Telltale women
the dramaturgy of female characters in Shakespeare's history plays

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TELLTALE WOMEN
The Dramaturgy of Female Characters in Shakespeare's History Plays

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Abstract

This thesis undertakes a feminist re-reading of the female characters in Shakespeare's history plays. Drawing upon both historical and contemporary performance and the broader theatrical context of the early modern period, I use the multidisciplinary lens of dramaturgy to investigate how these characters function as specifically theatrical figures, realigning traditional understandings of the shape and purpose of the history play.

The first chapter explores some of the most common assumptions about the nature of a history play—that it is tragic, that it is historically accurate, that it relates to a broader nationalistic agenda, and that exclusion of the female is fundamental to the genre—and looks at how reading plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries through the lens of their most prominent female characters troubles these assumptions.

The second chapter turns to female characters whose roles in the plays are smaller and more marginal, a position that has led to critics consistently underrating their contributions to the plot. The chapter uncovers a pattern of interactions that recur in minor female roles across almost all of Shakespeare's history plays, instances of attempted disruption of the plot that are unsuccessful.

The third chapter explores how characters narrate history within the plays themselves, particularly when they appear to transgress the boundaries of historical possibility through curses, prophecy, or narrating events they have not seen—extra-historical powers enabled by their marginalisation from political power.

The fourth chapter argues that these processes of marginalisation represent a feminine, not explicitly female, mode of storytelling by suggesting that male characters who undergo processes of disempowerment explicitly associated with femininity are endowed with the same historicising powers as female characters.

The fifth chapter examines contemporary history plays written by and about women that explicitly or implicitly challenge Shakespeare's still-influential historical dramaturgy. These new works reveal not only the negotiations that self-identified feminist writers undertake to find a space for women within Shakespearean dramaturgy, but the assumptions about Shakespeare, history, and the role of women within both that inform such artistic responses.

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Notes

Spelling has been modernised except when unavoidable, as in a quotation from a scholar who has not modernised spelling. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the plays under discussion are taken from the following editions, with further citations included in-text. Titles of Shakespeare's plays are occasionally abbreviated (*R2* for *Richard II,* etc). In some cases, as with the use of the 2008 reprints of the Oxford Shakespeare, texts were selected over more recent editions simply because they were the version accessible to me for final edits and consultations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some instances, page ranges in citations for journals and collections were not available for the same reason.

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Web citations throughout were checked and accurate as of 30 September 2020.

INTRODUCTION

> Shakespeare expressed [our common] humanity better than anyone. He just didn't always include women in the frame. One of the main purposes behind these [all-female] productions is for all classes of women to feel they own, belong to and have a stake in our history and our culture – and what better place to take that on than in a Shakespeare history play?
>
> Harriet Walter[1]

> It hath been thought the wisdom of some of the best governed Nations in the World, to take a great care of their Histories, by whom and in what manner they were written.
>
> Anonymous pamphleteer[2]

Despite their popular reputation as entirely male, there are female characters in Shakespeare's history plays. However, the reason for their reputation of absence is not a mystery. Compared to the dynamic heroines of the comedies, prominent victims of the tragedies, and symbolically weighted daughters of the late plays, the most frequently-performed histories include very few women, who do very little. This generalisation is partly rooted in the fact that the histories that do contain prominent female roles, such as the *Henry VI* plays, *King John,* and *Henry VIII,* are infrequently performed. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin note that there is 'a striking correlation—or rather a striking inverse correlation—between the amount of space any of these playscripts allows to female characters and its status in the Shakespeare canon'.[3] But these lesser-performed plays with their dominant female characters do exist, and so do the smaller female roles in the most famous histories. The assumption of absence has led to a dearth of critical attention paid to these roles, and to damaging popular assumptions about the role of women in Shakespearean historical narratives—misconceptions that continue to influence the ways the English-speaking world tells historical dramas today. If

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[1] Harriet Walter, 'On the Donmar stage, all Shakespeare's players are women,' *Guardian,* 15 October 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/oct/15/harriet-walter-donmar-shakespeare-women-henry-iv-julius-caesar>.

[2] Anonymous, *A Collection of Several Treatises Concerning the Reasons and Occasions of the Penal Laws* (London: Richard Royston, 1678; Early English Books Online) <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2240875337?accountid=11862>, A2-3.

[3] Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering A Nation* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 23.

women, as Harriet Walter states in the quotation that begins this introduction, cannot 'own, belong to, [or] have a stake in our history and our culture' without assuming the roles of men, then there is no hope for an understanding of the past that includes and values the contributions of women. The patriarchal history lessons consequently all seem true: supposedly, women did very little for most of history, and that has only recently begun to change. Feminist scholarship has dismantled this assumption in the realm of academia, but it persists in popular media. This thesis seeks to challenge popular understandings about the inessential role of female characters in Shakespeare's history plays, in the belief that to assert a role in history is an essential step in achieving equality in the present.

In a 2016 essay, Phyllis Rackin refers to the 'subversion/containment debate' of the 'last quarter of the twentieth century' as a particularly prevalent force in feminist criticism.[4] This is in reference to the theory first espoused by Stephen Greenblatt. By, among other things, depicting 'voices that seem to dwell outside the realms ruled by the potentates of the land', early modern writers in general and Shakespeare in particular were able to safely depict potentially subversive material because 'the form [of theatre] itself, as a primary expression of Renaissance power, helps to contain the radical doubts it continually provokes'. Though some plays strain this cautious relationship, 'the histories consistently pull back from such extreme pressure'.[5] For feminist scholars like Rackin, this became the mechanism by which Shakespeare could depict female characters as powerful as Margaret of Anjou and Joan of Arc, and in the process, still do nothing more than reify Tudor patriarchy. As we approach the second quarter of the twenty-first century, discussion of female characters in the history plays remains largely tethered to this dichotomy. This is in large part because the most common reference point for the topic is Rackin's own *Engendering a Nation,* co-written

[4] Phyllis Rackin, 'Why Feminism Still Matters' in *Shakespeare in Our Time,* ed. by Dympna Callaghan (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 7-13, p. 9.
[5] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets' in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The circulation of social energy in Renaissance England* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 43, 65.

with Jean E. Howard. It is a New Historicist overview of the female characters of Shakespeare's history plays, defined in this instance as the two tetralogies and *King John,* and it appears in the bibliography of virtually any work that discusses female characters and Shakespeare's histories. The dominance of this book means that a vast majority of criticism on this topic is framed in terms of Howard and Rackin's conclusions, usually in agreement.

Howard and Rackin conceive of Shakespeare's history plays as a cohesive ideological narrative, steadily shrinking the space allowed for female characters across the first tetralogy and into the second as a reflection of the increasing modernity of the Tudor worldview. As they summarise, 'in the *Henry VI* plays, the genealogical narratives that validated the older form of patriarchy centred on inter-generational relationships between fathers and sons. They tended to exclude female characters, or […] to represent women as dangerous, demonic others. The narratives of individual performance produced by the new version of patriarchy in plays like *Richard III* and *Richard II*, however, included idealised roles for women as the objects of sexual conquest and matrimonial possession that provide the final proof of the hero's manhood'. The *Henry IV* plays 'include residual conceptions of women and sexuality […T]here are female characters who resist domestication, and female sexuality still poses a threat to male authority'.[6] Finally, '*Henry V* is the only Shakespearean history play where male authority is demonstrated in modern terms, by the hero's sexual conquest of a desirable woman'.[7] In short, Howard and Rackin conceive of the role of female characters in history plays as increasingly relegated to the position of mere tools to uphold the plays' patriarchal construction of history. The sole exception to this pattern, they argue, is *King John*, whose messy second half they attribute to the impossibility of maintaining a coherent patriarchal historical narrative when women like Constance and Elinor are allowed to speak so freely

[6] Howard and Rackin, p. 188.
[7] Howard and Rackin, p. 196.

and forcefully.[8] As Rackin argues in her book *Stages of History,* which covers similar ground in its discussion of female characters, '[t]he incorporation of the feminine can only take place at the point where history stops. A world that truly includes the feminine is a world in which history cannot be written'.[9] This conception of female suppression rooted in a view of female characters as either demonic disruptors or little more than fertile vessels for future kings remains a dominant strain, appearing in the analyses of Katherine Eggert, Karen Newman, and across the essays collected in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare* and *The Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Histories.* Ralf Hertel conceives of the systematic suppression of female characters as a sublimated attempt to suppress Queen Elizabeth herself: 'National identity as a particularly masculine form of self-conception emerges precisely as a reaction to the anomaly of female power with which Elizabeth's reign confronted her subjects – and as an attempt to contain it'.[10] For Jacqueline Vanhoutte, this containment includes the sublimation of suppressed women into the nation, as England itself assumes 'the role of the mother' of royal lineages in their place, allowing the threat of women to be nullified.[11]

Just one year after *Engendering a Nation*, Nina Levine's *Women's Matters: Politics, Gender, and Nation in Shakespeare's Early History Plays* used similar New Historicist critical strategies to reach the opposite conclusion: that in fact, female characters were a consistently subversive presence whose apparent compliance with patriarchal narratives is unavoidably complicated by the fact that these plays were written during the reign of a female monarch.[12] Though Levine's work has not had nearly the same direct impact as

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[8] Howard and Rackin, p. 121.
[9] Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.176.
[10] Ralf Hertel, *Staging England in the Elizabethan History Play: Performing National Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), p. 194.
[11] Jacqueline Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and Politics* (Newark : University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp. 156, 144.
[12] Nina Levine, *Women's Matters: Politics, Gender, and Nation in Shakespeare's Early History Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), p. 17.

Howard and Rackin's, Graham Holderness draws a similar conclusion in *Shakespeare Recycled,* offering a reminder that the plays must be interpreted in light of the fact that 'the most powerful member of society was, after all, a woman'.[13] A parallel argument has been made more recently in relation to female audiences. Stephen Orgel, for example, argues that as 'theatres are viable only insofar as they satisfy their audiences', so female audience members must have approved in some measure of the depiction of female characters, even those that seem sexist or troubling now.[14] But neither extreme of suppression or subversion can fully account for the diversity and complexity of the female roles in Shakespeare's history plays. The insistence on reading female characters only as signposts for the position of women in the culture overall rather than as fictional, dramatic characters (and characters played by boys, no less) that both do and do not operate under the same constraints and expectations as actual humans has cut criticism of these characters off from essential elements of the plays' identities as performance texts. This thesis will draw upon many works that fall in the middle of the subversion/containment binary, and which offer nuanced and innovative readings of the history plays and the female characters within them. But while interesting scholarship has appeared in journals and collections, we have yet to see a work on the scale of *Engendering a Nation* that tackles the collective position of the female characters in the history plays while rejecting the subversion/suppression rubric. It is the aim of this thesis to fill that gap, and to read the history plays through the lens of new forms of feminist scholarship.

In the introduction to the first edition of *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare,* Lisa Jardine sought to summarise and define the still-emergent field of feminist Shakespearean scholarship. She expressed her 'tide of personal

[13] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 84.
[14] Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 11.

irritation at the apparent inability of such [feminist] critics to break with the conventions of orthodox Shakespeare criticism […] Just concentrating on the female characters, or protesting as political feminists at the sexist views expressed by the male characters, will not get us very far with a feminist Shakespeare criticism appropriate to the 1980s'.[15] Her corrective, expressed over the course of the book, was to bring historical context more strongly to bear on the plays: 'criticism has regularly treated Shakespeare's female characters with unconscious partisanship, often because of assumptions which can now be shown to be false about contemporary women's lives. If it has done so, then an alternative 'special interest' view such as I offer here ought to broaden the vision of all those who study Shakespeare's plays, and those of his near contemporaries'.[16] Feminist criticism, in her view, is this practice (not, as she notes, really a theory): recovering and investigating the position of 'femaleness' in Shakespeare's plays within their historical context.

Writing almost thirty years later, Phyllis Rackin argued for the continuing utility of such historically informed, political feminist criticism ('Why Feminism Still Matters'): 'In demonstrating that Shakespeare's countrywomen were not always as marginalised and repressed as we had been taught to believe, feminist historicist scholars gave women—students as well as critics and teachers—the material to contest our own marginalisation as readers of Shakespeare's plays'.[17] While taking more of an ideological stance on the purpose of such work than Jardine does—expressly stating that it is an act of liberation and correction in favour of the position of women—Rackin finds the same purpose at the heart of feminist Shakespearean criticism. This does not mean that feminist criticism is a historical project with mere literary set-dressing, or a literary project with historical anecdotes just tacked on top. As Dympna Callaghan writes in the introduction to *A Feminist Companion to*

[15] Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 1.
[16] Jardine, pp. 7-8.
[17] Rackin, 'Why Feminism', p. 10.

Shakespeare, 'canonical representations of women […] hold a hugely important place. However, they do so only in relation to all manner of noncanonical knowledges and texts. That is, we can only tell what Shakespeare means about gender, sexuality, race, or social relations by reading his texts in the context of the culture in which he wrote them'.[18] To understand a culture and to understand its texts (contemporary or historical) are inextricable endeavours.

By these criteria, this thesis is a feminist project, not only in that it is concerned with female characters, but because it is interested in historicising those characters not as people, but as theatrical roles. The historical context I will use to do so is not primarily of the type highlighted by Jardine and Rackin—pamphlets, guild records, court cases, women's writing—but the dramaturgical realities of the stage on which and for which these characters were created. If, as second-wave feminists have argued, we can only read Shakespeare's use of gender 'by reading his texts in the context of the culture in which he wrote them', I contend we can only understand said texts by understanding the context of the performance culture for which he wrote them.

Henry S. Turner proposes one means of achieving this understanding in his 2012 article 'Toward a New Theatricality?'. In this article, he sums up 'the problem confronting scholarship on early modern drama' as a fairly straightforward one: 'what conventions allowed the theaters to function as a specific kind of representation distinct from prose narrative, or poetry, or architecture or painting, even as it often drew on the imaginative and formal resources of these other modes?'. His proposed method for addressing the difficult necessity of identifying how precisely theatre functions as a mode of cultural communication unique from the other forms he notes is worth quoting at some length:

[18] Dympna Callaghan, 'Introduction,' in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* ed. by Dympna Callaghan (Malden: Blackwell, 2016), p. 1.

> it will begin by identifying the cluster of mimetic and symbolic techniques, methods, objects, bodies, conventions, signs, or other significant elements for which we do not have a consistent term and which the concept of "theatricality" conveniently designates. We need what engineers call an "exploded view" of early modern theatricality, a blueprint that isolates functional parts, magnifies them for analysis, then reintegrates them into the theatrical apparatus. We need it to capture the full "event" of theater—its codes, its sites, its capacities, its limits.[19]

The work Turner proposes had already begun to be undertaken when he wrote this article, and interest has continued since. Turner himself edited a collection, *Twenty-First Century Perspectives on Early Modern Theatricality,* which offers a sample of some major critics working in this area, including Evelyn Tribble, Jeremy Lopez, and Jonathan Gil Harris. Other examples include Tiffany Stern's work on performance-related texts; Farah Karim-Cooper's work with makeup and gesture; and Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass's work on clothes, textiles, and objects.[20]

Janette Dillon uses related methods specifically in relation to history plays in *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History*, proposing to analyse the plays' 'spatial practice that conveyed particular kinds of meaning and relationships in a way that was so strongly internalised as to be obvious at the time'. She argues that these practices, along with the material elements of performance such as costume and props, combine to create 'particular scenic units (both whole scenes and shorter units of action) which are especially recurrent and familiar to the genre'. These units unite to create 'important patterns within a single play as well as […] links with other plays in the same series'.[21] Though Dillon only dedicates one chapter to female characters, this is a theoretical framework that can prove particularly fruitful when analysing the women of the history plays. These characters'

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[19] Henry S. Turner, 'Toward a New Theatricality?', *Renaissance Drama*, 40 (2012), 29–35, pp. 33, 35.
[20] Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[21] Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 4-5.

frequent silent presence and the fact that all were embodied by boys are two examples of the unique problems they pose—problems that are most usefully addressed by attending not merely to text and cultural context, but also to the concrete actions taking place on a stage. In recent years, Rackin herself has acknowledged that a lack of attention to the actual conditions of performance may have impeded some of her analysis in *Engendering a Nation* and *Stages of History*. Of her reading of Lady Falconbridge in *King John*, for example, she writes that describing the character as the representative of the 'nightmare situation' of adultery 'seemed valid to me because it confirmed the paradigmatic view of women's place in Shakespeare's world. Looking at it now, I realise that it elided a number of features of the text: the facts that the revelation of Lady Falconbridge's adultery is depicted in humorous terms, that the Bastard it produced is a sympathetic character', and other features that only emerge when a play is carefully considered as a performance text, not simply a literary or historical document.[22]

I believe that Turner's concept of 'New Theatricality' already exists under another name, fittingly drawn from the world of practical performance that he seeks to illuminate: it is dramaturgy. Michael Mark Chemers, in a guide directed at aspiring dramaturgs, defines dramaturgy as 'a term that refers both to the *aesthetic architecture* of a piece of dramatic literature (its structures, themes, goals, and conventions) and the *practical philosophy* of theater practice employed to create a full performance.'[23] It is a union, just as Turner suggests, of literary analysis and consideration of the practical, physical, and material requirements of the early modern playhouse and playgoing culture. In this thesis, therefore, I embed such practicalities into my literary analysis, reading the texts not as products of pure imagination, but as shaped by such demands as the use of boy players, a repertory playing

[22] Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare & Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 23.
[23] Michael Mark Chemers, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), p. 3.

schedule, expectations set by other plays and forms of story-telling, and the physical space of the stage itself that is filled by physical bodies.

As Pascale Aebischer writes, 'bodies that are marginalised in play texts and literary criticism may come centerstage in performance and performance studies', and it is for this reason that such a holistic, material consideration of early modern performance is essential to understanding female characters in particular. Aebischer describes this process as 'negotiated reading':

> Negotiated readings deliberately seek out opaque signs, empty spaces, silences, marginalised sign-clusters and characters to offer alternate readings that work as far as possible *within* the object under analysis rather than against it, filling the 'empty' spaces with what is always already contained in them and what can be made visible with the help of a spotlight. The point of such negotiated readings is not only the recovery of invisible, lost, forgotten marginalised stories, but also pleasure. Rather than be defeated by the frustration of finding themselves interpellated by Shakespeare, whether in the play texts or in performances, readers or spectators may […find] enjoyment in the contribution they make to the creation of meaning.[24]

This process of negotiated reading unites the feminist and dramaturgical interests of this project. Like Aebischer, I will also consider modern performance alongside textual analysis and historical performance throughout this thesis. As she argues, 'Shakespeare's plays are works that live as much in their written/printed versions as in their performative re-productions and they are therefore most fruitfully examined in both forms side by side'.[25] Contemporary performance provides useful examples of how dramaturgical features of the plays are conveyed or adapted, and I will refer throughout this thesis to twentieth and twenty-first century performance not primarily as case studies or separate analyses, but as another means of reading and illuminating the playtexts under analysis. We cannot discover how Shakespeare's plays were originally embodied, how they took in costume and space and

[24] Pascale Aebischer, *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 5, 12.
[25] Aebischer, p. 13.

spectators, but we can consider how later artists have done so, and what these decisions suggest about the plays' dramatic structures and enduring legacies.

By engaging the similar but distinct methodologies of reading early modern and current performance practises, I seek to illuminate what I call Shakespeare's 'historical dramaturgy'. I define this as the artistic process by which historical material is adapted for dramatic representation. This is not merely a catalogue of what is changed or excluded compared to Shakespeare's sources, but a consideration of the full range of dramatic techniques that are deployed to bring a historically-based story to the stage; in Chemers' terms, both the aesthetic architecture and the practical philosophy of the plays' adaptations of history. As Callaghan states above, canonical representations of women are an essential element of understanding the position of women in a given culture. And when it comes to Shakespeare in particular, they are vital elements not only of the theatrical and literary culture of his time, but also of our own, as one that is deeply indebted to Shakespeare's works. Understanding the position of female characters within Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy is key to understanding their position in our culture's own habitual structures of historical narratives—and understanding the position we have created for women in the past feeds directly into how we see their position in the present. As Callaghan writes, 'Feminism is about creating the future differently by looking at history differently'. I hope this thesis can contribute to creating the future differently by understanding how the narratives of history that are now so familiar to us were created.

I argue that there is a distinctive feminine dramaturgical position in Shakespeare's history plays, a facet of his historical dramaturgy that is deliberately gendered and specifically associated with women and feminine men. It is a structural role that is linked to marginalisation and silence, but also to unique linguistic forms that only characters excluded from the centres of political power and control over the dramatic action can access. Such

characters trouble the boundaries between history and other, fictional genres—and thus, through them, we can begin to understand where Shakespeare understood the boundaries of the history play to lie in contrast to other genres. Male characters can also assume these feminine dramaturgical positions, often at the cost of being perceived as effeminate by other characters and losing their ability to influence history. The threat of such a feminised loss of power runs through both sequential tetralogies of history plays, forming a tension that underpins all of Shakespeare's representations of historical events. Thus, this feminine presence is essential not only to understanding the function of individual roles in Shakespeare's histories, but in illuminating how he actively engaged with history as a dramatist.

The first chapter, Facts Disfigured: Reading History Through Female Characters, explores some of the most common assumptions about the nature of a history play—that it is tragic, that it is historically accurate, that it relates to a broader nationalistic agenda, and that exclusion of the female is fundamental to the genre—and looks at how reading plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries through the lens of their most prominent female characters troubles these preconceptions. The first section explores how the sub-genre of romantic or comic histories challenge the assumption that a history play is necessarily concerned with historical accuracy, and how reading Shakespeare's *Edward III* as an example of this genre demonstrates its influence on the rest of his canon. The next section re-evaluates the stereotype that foreign characters—and especially foreign female characters—are always a threat against which the English national identity can be defined by contrast. The third section focuses on Margaret of Anjou in order to consider the importance of reading the plays as theatrical documents, and characters as dramatic devices. The final section looks again to the tone of the plays to unpick how scenes of overwhelming female emotion can be seen as essential features of the history play genre, and part of what

contributed to the genre's popularity in the eras when it was most frequently performed. By re-evaluating the assumptions associated with these categories and reading the plays through the female characters rather than assuming that they are marginal to the plays' purposes, I set the stage for exploring how female characters can unlock key features of Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy.

The second chapter, From The Margins: Reading Female Characters Into History, turns to female characters whose roles in the plays are smaller and more marginal, a position that has led critics to consistently underestimate their contributions to the plot. This chapter uncovers a pattern of interactions that recur in minor female roles across almost all of Shakespeare's history plays, mirrored instances of attempted disruption of the plot that are unsuccessful. These efforts take the form of attempts to forestall political events, often wars, which frequently point to flaws in the male leaders' plans; and resistance to marriages. Drawing upon Philip C. Maguire's concept of the 'open silence', this chapter highlights such inconclusive interventions as moments that demand engagement and interpretation by the audience, inviting the potential for spectators to unbalance the supposed didactic and moral purpose of the plays by attaching their sympathies to the characters out of power rather than the kings who command them. Such imaginative potential is seen particularly clearly in the marginalised figures of lower class female characters and the women whose scenes are dismissed as 'domestic' or 'private'—in truth, simply scenes whose interactions depict the types of events unrecorded by traditional history, but which are essential to the history play as a theatrical genre. The presence of these curtailed or unrecorded incidents, and their thematic importance to the plays in which they appear, suggests that the relationship of the plays to their chronicle sources is less one of direct adaptation than of querying and contestation.

The third chapter, History as Exclusion: Shakespeare's Feminine Historiography, explores how characters narrate history within the plays themselves, particularly when they appear to transgress the boundaries of historical possibility through curses, prophecy, or describing events they have not seen—extra-historical powers enabled by their marginalisation from political power. This chapter proposes the concept at the heart of Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy: that marginalisation from political power gives way to other types of insight enabled by the medium of the theatre, a specifically feminine relationship to historical narrative that I call Shakespeare's feminine historiography. Beginning with an analysis of the connection between mourning and cursing, the chapter explores the 'genealogies of loss' that permit female characters to articulate their own versions of dynastic history. I then turn to other ways in which female characters are marginalised from the centres of historical power, and the clarity of historical vision that their outside position grants them, rendering them simultaneously suppressed and empowered by their exclusion. Finally, this chapter considers how genre itself operates as a force for this exclusion, exploring scenes which seem to defy the tonal and generic boundaries of their plays, suggesting Shakespeare's awareness of the limitations of the history play genre for containing certain types of female stories.

The fourth chapter, Blurring the Boundaries: Effeminacy and Feminine History, argues that these processes of marginalisation represent a feminine, not solely female, mode of storytelling by demonstrating that male characters who undergo processes of disempowerment explicitly associated with femininity are endowed with the same historiographical powers as female characters. I first explore male characters whose effeminacy is emphasised by their relegation to feminine forms of history. Hotspur's legacy is famously only carried by his wife, as is Richard II's, but this chapter argues that Falstaff and Henry IV also trace a parallel pattern of feminised disempowerment across the course of

the second tetralogy. In contrast are Henry V and Henry VIII, both of whom affirm their masculinised legacies by explicitly avoiding entrusting their histories to female voices. The chapter then turns to Shakespeare's earlier history plays, where male characters follow a less linear path into feminised disempowerment. The shifting gender positions of Queen Margaret and King Henry VI complicate a clear correlation between dramaturgical gender and character gender, and demonstrate how certain characters continually renegotiate their relationship to masculine history. Finally, I consider the malleable and unstable position of boy characters, whose ability to shift between identification as young men and or as feminine boys renders them particularly vulnerable to feminised erasure by history.

The fifth chapter, Modern History: The Past in the Present, examines contemporary history plays written by and about women that explicitly or implicitly challenge Shakespeare's still-influential historical dramaturgy, drawing a direct line from Shakespeare's dramatic structures to the way work is created in the present day. These new works reveal not only the negotiations that self-identified feminist writers undertake to find a space for women within Shakespearean dramaturgy, but the assumptions about Shakespeare, history, and the role of women within both that inform such artistic responses. Returning to the categories of accuracy, Englishness, and emotion laid out in the first chapter, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's *Emilia,* Breach Theatre's *It's True, It's True, It's True,* and Rona Munro's *The James Plays* provide case studies for exploring Shakespeare's enduring influence as a historical dramatist, and how his legacy is replicated, rejected, and reimagined for and by women in the present.

CHAPTER ONE | Facts Disfigured: Reading History Through Female Characters

To explore how female characters operate within Shakespeare's history plays, it would seem reasonable to first define what a history play is. This, as the varied and inconclusive debates on the subject demonstrate, is easier said than done. In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare's most prominent historical female characters exist in works that trouble some of the most commonly accepted definitions and traits of the history play. Far from being resolutely peripheral and marginal figures, Shakespeare's female characters consistently inhabit a space where the relationship between history and fiction is laid bare and questioned. This is a relationship that raises productive paths of inquiry for beginning to understand, if not the history play as a genre overall, what Shakespeare understood it to mean. As this Shakespearean definition—and influential misconceptions of it—has had a significant effect on the definition of the genre as a whole, the lens female characters cast on Shakespeare's histories offers important correctives to many prevailing assumptions about the genre. Therefore, I will first lay out some of the terms of the conversation around generic definitions.

While contemporary critics have become increasingly sceptical of the stability of the history play as a genre, due to the lack of consistent structural and generic markers within the plays and the flexibility of the word 'history' on their title pages, writers of the Elizabethan period seemed to recognise that telling a story about the past of the country in which they lived was different from telling stories about other times and places. In support of this idea, Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer point to the induction of the anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women,* in which the personifications of Comedy, Tragedy, and History debate who will preside over the play to come. This, they argue, is evidence of a recognition that history plays

were indeed a distinct genre, even if the induction does not make entirely clear what exactly writers of the period understood the parameters of the genre to be.[1] In their respective defences of the sixteenth century stage, Thomas Nash and Thomas Heywood both highlight history plays, pointing to the particular didactic moral power of what Heywood calls 'our domestic histories'.[2] Nashe proposes that witnessing 'our forefathers' valiant acts' will be 'reproof to these dangerous, effeminate days of ours'—a reproof, he makes clear, that is specifically rooted in seeing stories 'borrowed out of our English Chronicles'.[3] Echoing this ideal, Heywood asks 'What coward to see his countryman valiant would not be ashamed of his own cowardice?' As with Nashe, it is specifically 'English blood seeing the person of any bold English man presented' that kindles this connection and its attendant inspiration to better, more valiant behaviour. Heywood and Nashe both suggest that a history play might be defined less by its structure or content than by its purpose, a definition that twentieth- and twenty-first century critics echo in some respects. E. M. W. Tillyard was the most influential early critic to articulate the modern understanding of such a purpose, proposing in his 1944 *Shakespeare's History Plays* that the eight plays from *1 Henry VI* to *Henry V* form a deliberate, unified story moving chronologically towards the triumphant accession of the Tudors at the end of *Richard III*.[4] While national narrative replaces Nashe and Heywood's sense of individual self-improvement, for Nashe, Heywood, and Tillyard, the history play is directed towards a greater goal, one that transcends plot or character and instead reflects upon the character of England itself—either through the valour of its (implicitly male) citizens, or by providing a narrative through which it can understand its chaotic political state as

[1] Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer, eds., *English Historical Drama, 1500-1660: Forms Outside the Canon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 12.
[2] Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Nicholas Oakes, 1612; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011) <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A03185.0001.001>.
[3] Thomas Nash, "Excerpt from *Pierce Penniless*" in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th Ed, Vol. I (New York: W. W. Norton, & Co., 1993), pp. 1010-1013.
[4] E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

nevertheless ordained by providence. Though articulated differently, these proposed aims are linked in understanding the plays as designed to both reflect and help maintain a patriarchal status quo.

Later critics retain more of Tillyard's influence than is often acknowledged. In 1989, David Womersley wrote that 'despite today having no advocates, Tillyard's depiction of Shakespeare's history plays as dramas of orthodoxy is nevertheless a powerful critical presence'.[5] Over thirty years later, it is still taken as a given that history plays are not only fundamentally political, but fundamentally concerned with reifying the ruling powers of Shakespeare's day. Stephen Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment, which replaced Tillyard's providential narrative with a vision of theatre as a subtler tool of state control,[6] lingers in discussions of the history play even as broader Shakespearean scholarship has moved in other directions. The very title of Ralf Hertel's 2014 monograph *Staging England in the Elizabethan History Play: Performing National Identity* suggests the form that the Tillyardian underlying narrative now generally takes—that is, an understanding that the Elizabethan writers of history plays were deliberately engaged in the formation of a nascent English national identity.[7] Where Nashe and Heywood indirectly hoped to establish a continuity of Englishness by inspiring men in the present to act more like men of the past, contemporary critics find a subtler form of collective self-definition. For Hertel, history plays are unique in that they, unlike other historiographical sources, 'present us with a multitude of conflicting viewpoints and thus question any grand narrative that history might be reduced to', thus rejecting the providential narrative of Tillyard.[8] But there is also a different grand

[5] David Womersley, 'The Politics Of Shakespeare's *King John*,' *The Review of English Studies*, 40 (1989), 497–515, p. 498.
[6] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
[7] Ralf Hertel, *Staging England in the Elizabethan History Play: Performing National Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).
[8] Hertel, p. 89.

narrative at work, for Hertel and for others: the exclusion of the female from the definition of England and Englishness. Hertel proposes that '[n]ational identity as a particularly masculine form of self-conception emerges precisely as a reaction to the anomaly of female power with which Elizabeth's reign confronted her subjects—and as an attempt to contain it'.[9] Thus, performing masculinity and performing Englishness became interchangeable, and '[i]f membership in the emergent nation hinges on performance, on defending England in battle and on displaying English vigour, as the use of tropes of motherland and virgin country insinuates, women, mostly denied the arena of warfare, are left out of this community'. Female power is instead something that men must 'struggle to control'.[10] Richard Helgerson sees Shakespeare's history plays as 'mov[ing] in the direction of greater exclusion' in terms of both gender and class as his career progressed.[11] This is also the arc envisioned by Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin in *Engendering a Nation,* which traces a movement towards modernity in the form of the increasing marginalisation of women, and which remains the most commonly referenced work on the topic of female characters in Shakespeare's histories.[12] For Helgerson, Howard, and Rackin, these exclusions are in the service of creating a cohesive Tudor historiography that can in turn give rise to the sense of a cohesive England. Critics since have largely accepted this premise, building up a critical tradition that genders the act of nation-building as performed by the history plays as singularly male and frames the exclusion of female characters as fundamental to Shakespeare's historiography. With notable exceptions, like the female characters of *Richard III*, most analyses of the topic imply that one definition of the history play might be as a genre that defines itself against its female characters. In this thesis, however, I would like to propose the opposite, by arguing

[9] Hertel, p. 194.
[10] Hertel, pp. 207-9.
[11] Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 204.
[12] Howard and Rackin, p. 196.

that Shakespeare's female characters in fact can clarify the nature of Shakespeare's engagements with history, providing a vision of the history play as a genre that is in contentious conversation with its historical source materials, displaying a distinct awareness of the limits of the genre's ability to truly depict history.

Each of the four sections of this chapter will highlight a key site of complexity and contestation in the history plays: the plays' relationship with historical accuracy, their role in defining Englishness, their nature as theatrical documents, and the blurred line between history and tragedy. By reading these questions through Shakespeare's female characters, it becomes clear that they play central roles in each play's engagement with fictionalising history. I refer to this as each play's 'historical dramaturgy', the process of fictionalising, or more specifically, dramatising history by applying a theatrical structure to factual events. By exploring how female characters illuminate the nature of Shakespeare's engagement with his historical source materials in structuring the plays as a whole, we can then turn to the specific dramaturgy of female and feminine roles within the plays, which will be taken up in subsequent chapters. What separates a dramaturgical analysis like the one undertaken here from structuralism or formalism is its inherent interdisciplinarity: it considers all the mechanisms a dramatic text draws upon to convey meaning, from text to performance to cultural context. It also demands that we read these characters not as women, with human psychology and interiority, but as *female characters*, dramatic devices that are consciously and deliberately deployed, as much a constructed element of the drama as a prop, song, or well-timed letter—and one whose inclusion depends on the specific and numerically limited resource of boy players. Engaging in this form of dramaturgical reading and, through it, recognising the constructed nature of even the most canonical historical narratives, challenges traditional assumptions about the structure of historical drama and the marginal place of women within such narratives. The concepts highlighted here—historical accuracy,

English national identity, early modern staging conditions, and the place of human emotion in historical narrative—will underpin the arguments and explorations undertaken in the subsequent chapters.

History and Accuracy: *Edward III*

Though definitions of the history play have traditionally been modelled in Shakespeare's image, recent scholarship is working to dismantle the assumptions about the genre that have stemmed from this narrow focus.[13] But popular assumptions are slow to erode, and the broader understanding of a history play has been and largely continues to be shaped by Shakespeare's First Folio and the plays defined as histories there: political tragedies centred around an English monarch and primarily derived from the chronicle histories of England of Raphael Holinshed, Edward Hall, and others. Their partner in shaping this understanding is Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II,* which Jeremy M. Lopez finds has served as more or less the exclusive representative of non-Shakespearean history plays in anthologies of early modern literature. It is chosen, Lopez notes, because it is so like Shakespeare—but in being like Shakespeare's plays in its tone and structure, it is very unlike almost everyone else's.[14] Early critics tended to reflect this difference as Shakespeare and Marlowe merely achieving the apotheosis of the history play form, after which the genre (supposedly) promptly died as Marlowe himself was killed and Shakespeare largely retreated from the genre. From Shakespeare and Marlowe we have inherited a historical dramaturgy that is still reflected in historical narratives today, a tragic mode centralising powerful figures, usually monarchs, in

[13] See Grant and Ravelhofer; Benjamin Griffin, *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama, 1385-1600* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2001); Michael Hattaway, 'The Shakespearean history play' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays,* ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3-24; Paulina Kewes, 'The Elizabethan History Play: A True Genre?' in *A Companion to Shakespeare: The Histories,* ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 170-193.
[14] Jeremy M. Lopez, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 78.

whom 'history becomes psychomachia'.[15] From other writers of the period, we might have gained a more flexible vision of history—one that an early modern audience would have accepted as equally valid as the Shakespearean and Marlovian models. These alternative models—often dismissed as insufficiently serious by critics—open up a broader landscape of setting, genre, and tone. But most relevantly for this chapter, they also provide a wholly different space for female characters than that provided by Shakespeare's history plays, a space that admits them as central to the plays' moral and thematic purposes. Frequently left out of conversations about history plays by scholars due to their focus on ahistorical adventures, these underdiscussed plays are invested in probing the ethical limits of kings' power, an investigation that places the monarchs' treatment of female characters at its heart.

Shakespeare's clearest participation in this mode of the genre is *Edward III,* a work that synthesises some of the traits highlighted above: it stretches the boundaries of strictly historical content, it rejects tragedy as the default structure and tone for history, and its place in the Shakespearean canon is disputed, meaning that its influence on the genre as a whole has never been fully felt. *Edward III* is now widely accepted as having been written in part by Shakespeare, and is attributed to him in the Riverside Shakespeare (1996), New Cambridge Shakespeare (1998), Oxford Complete Works (2016), and Arden Third Series (2017). About half of *Edward III* does read like an early Shakespeare play, replete with battle scenes, political negotiation, and disdainful depictions of foreigners. But that is not the half largely attributed to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is thought to have contributed the scenes which depict King Edward III's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to seduce the married Countess of Salisbury, who resolutely refuses his advances.[16] While some critics comment on the strangeness of this split structure, others have recognised that Shakespeare is in fact operating

[15] Lopez, p. 78.
[16] Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennet, 'Introduction,' in *King Edward III,* Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 69-78.

within a distinct subgenre of the history play, often called historical romances or historical comedies.[17]

In historical comedies, 'a King or Prince is overcome with foolish or ill-conceived sexual desire that must be vanquished before he and his realm can prosper'.[18] As the label suggests, these plays blend historical characters with comic structures, not in distinct subplots, but interacting with each other. Both historical romance and historical comedy are anachronistic labels, of course, but their use reflects the critical tendency to segregate these works from more serious, canonical history plays.[19] Even in many of the re-evaluations of the genre cited above, they do not tend to be fully accounted for, an omission that cuts off one of the most interesting ways writers of history plays deployed their female characters. The semi-historical, semi-comic historical romances seem to have been a relatively popular trend, and there are several extant examples: Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,* in which the future King Edward I pursues the commoner Margaret of Fressingfield; or his *George a Green, the Pinner of Wakefield,* in which conflicts between King Edward IV of England and King James II of Scotland are interspersed with the love travails of the eponymous George and the legendary Robin Hood; or the anonymous *Fair Em The Miller's Daughter,* in which William the Conqueror pursues the mysterious Marianna. Though they rarely depict incidents drawn from chronicle sources, Paola Pugliatti finds that they do display signs of direct but subtle engagement with history.[20] Deliberate attention is drawn to their historical settings and figures, even though they otherwise do not adhere to the standards of historical accuracy that

[17] Patricia A. Cahill, *Unto the Breach: Martial Formations, Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 103.
[18] Jean E. Howard, 'Women and the Making of Shakespeare as Historical Dramatist' in *Women Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception, and Performance,* ed. by Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowin Orlin, and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13-19, pp. 4-5.
[19] Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeares English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993).
[20] Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 36.

we expect. These plays strongly suggest, however, that we must realign these expectations when considering early modern historical drama.

I wish to bring *Edward III* into conversation with a different Robert Greene play, *The Scottish History of James IV*. The latter play provides particularly extreme challenges to almost every accepted feature of the history genre. However, this comparison illuminates structural similarities that suggest *James IV* has a stronger claim to the status of history play than its muddy relationship to historical accuracy seems to allow—a claim that forces an expansion of our understanding of the history play genre and the place of female characters within it. Despite the title, which in its full quarto version falsely implies that the play will contain the titular king's death in battle at Flodden Field, the characters bear no clear relation to any historical figures associated with King James IV of Scotland. The plot, too, digresses wildly from even fictionalised historical content, focusing instead on romantic intrigues until the fifth act, and is framed as a story told by the Scottish hermit Bohan to Oberon, King of the Fairies. However, as Dermot Cavanagh argues, our sense that all of these features are inappropriate to a history play is not reflective of the Elizabethan output of the genre as a whole, especially when one looks beyond Shakespeare.[21] Indeed, the phrase 'history play' would have been capacious almost to the point of meaninglessness for much of the 16th century, as 'history' was used interchangeably with 'comedy' to mean little more than 'story'.[22] In contrast, most of Shakespeare's history plays, as will be discussed further below, were at this point described as tragedies. In being called a 'history', therefore, one could argue that *The Scottish History of James IV* is not actually making any claim to being a historical drama. But an owner of the 1598 quarto now held at the British Library did indeed read 'history' as a claim to accuracy. He was so chagrined by the play's misleading title that

[21] Dermot Cavanagh, *Language and Politics in the Sixteenth-Century History Play* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 60.
[22] Griffin, p. 8.

he crossed it out and added instead, 'or rather fiction of English & Scottish matters comical'.[23] The annotator is believed to be Sir George Buc, who became Master of the Revels in 1610 and died in 1622.[24] When precisely he made this annotation is uncertain, but Alan H. Nelson notes that no play texts have been found in his collection with a publication date after 1605.[25] While this does not guarantee that the annotations predate the apparent end of his collecting habits, it may help narrow the potential time frame.

It would be instructive to know the date of Buc's annotation because the last decades of the sixteenth century and first years of the seventeenth marked a period of distinct change in the use and understanding of the label 'history' as applied to drama, a shift away from the relatively broad usage described above. Benjamin Griffin writes that 'history play' began to appear as its own category in catalogues and descriptions of plays around 1591.[26] This newly distinct classification also seems to have begun taking on a distinct dramaturgical shape. By the time John Ford composed the prologue for his historical play *Perkin Warbeck* in the 1630s, he was careful to note that the play contained no 'Unnecessary mirth forced, to endear / A multitude' (Prologue 24-5): that is, theatrical fashion now saw the addition of comic elements as 'forced' and pandering to the uneducated—the trend scornfully described by Sir Philip Sidney in 1595 as 'mingling Kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust[ing] in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion'.[27] Sidney disdained what he saw happening onstage; Ford assures his reader such mingling will not happen at all.

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[23] Reproduced in *The Scottish History of James the Fourth,* ed by. Norman Sanders, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 2.
[24] Alan H. Nelson, "George Buc, William Shakespeare, and the Folger George a Greene," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49 (1998), 74-83, p. 79.
[25] Nelson, p. 80.
[26] Griffin, p. 19.
[27] Philip Sidney, 'Defence of Poesie,' ed by. Risa S. Bear, Renasence Editions (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1995) <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/defence.html>.

Perhaps Buc's annotation represents a shifting view of *James IV* in light of the changes to both the use of the word 'history' and preferences for its onstage depiction—the 'mingling Kings and clowns' no longer seen merely as forced or indiscreet, but as disqualifying a play from the title of history altogether. Or perhaps it demonstrates that *James IV* really was never considered properly historical. Griffin states that the title's reference to the historical James should not be taken to mean that Greene intended his play to be seen as history, but rather as the printer's marketing ploy, an attempt to cash in on the vogue for history plays of the early 1590s.[28] Norman Sanders finds signs that the play was set from a manuscript in Greene's own hand, suggesting that the title may well have been Greene's—though Sanders likewise argues that Greene's only intention was to capitalise on the popularity of the history play genre.[29] Cavanagh and David M. Bergeron, on the other hand, argue in favour of the play's intentional engagement with history as a genre: Cavanagh sees the insistent troubling of all forms of authority within the plot as part of a broader interest in probing at 'the authority of history itself', an effort that demands the audience is simultaneously aware of the play as history, and aware of its deviations from both the expectations of the genre and actual past events.[30] Bergeron, discussing Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,* notes that, broadly speaking, 'for Greene and others history does not exist as the opposite of fiction; rather, dramatic art moves along a spectrum between these seeming opposites'.[31] So, while *James IV* is not necessarily truthful, that does not mean it cannot be history.

To a certain extent, *James IV*'s historicity is a difficult premise to maintain. Greene's departure from the historical record becomes obvious in the very first scene. Instead of King

[28] Griffin, p. 20.
[29] Sanders, p. xxxvi.
[30] Cavanagh, p. 78.
[31] David M. Bergeron, ''Bogus History' and Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*', *Early Theatre* 17 (2014), 93-112, p. 94.

James IV's actual marriage to Margaret Tudor, King Henry VIII's sister, Greene's King of Scots' bride is the fictional Dorothea. But the broad strokes of her story parallel Margaret's in ways that do not feel wholly coincidental: she is also an English princess, and she is caught in the crossfire of Anglo-Scottish aggression, just as Margaret was when James IV seized on Henry VIII's renewed wars with the French—traditional allies of Scotland—as an excuse to launch a campaign of his own in England. Audience members may well have noticed these parallels through familiarity with Holinshed or other chroniclers. But such familiarity with the actual events (or an approximation of them) would also equip audiences to recognise the play's inaccuracies. Background knowledge, then, would be something of a double-edged sword, on the one hand allowing for a deeper understanding of the play's distinct and telling echoes of factual history, and on the other making the extent of its departures more starkly obvious. But intimate familiarity with chronicle histories would by no means have been the universal audience state. Despite critical insistence that accuracy is a defining feature of a history play, and awareness that Elizabethans widely accepted some things as accurate (particularly events and figures related to Britain's mythic past) that we now recognise as entirely fictional, the standards by which accuracy was supposedly judged have been taken for granted.

Griffin argues that historical material was widely available in a variety of sources, so '[e]ven the illiterate were familiar to a high degree with the story of England' thanks to 'popular literary arts—plays, ballads, and pamphlets— [which] formed, for the illiterate and the learned alike, a segmented but continuous patchwork History-of-England in the mind. […] [I]t was this that was operative when they watched history plays'.[32] *James IV* provides an example of how this relationship among plays, pamphlets, and broadside ballads may have worked. Thomas Deloney recorded a ballad about James IV and his death at Flodden Field in

[32] Griffin, p. 76.

a book whose earliest surviving edition dates from 1619, though Deloney himself died in 1600, and a stationers' register record suggests the earliest edition, now lost, was printed in 1597. Even then, Deloney claimed that the ballad was an old, popular tune—and therefore was possibly known by some of *James IV*'s first audiences, and certainly by some readers of the 1598 quarto.[33] In the song, Queen Margaret begs her husband King James not to ride to war with England, for which he threatens her with imprisonment and death: 'Away, quoth he, with this silly fool / in prison fast let her lie: / For she is come of the English blood, / and for these words she shall die'.[34] Greene's King, too, ultimately has his queen imprisoned and tries to have her killed, thus creating a narrative echo between these two 'historical' works that has no basis in actual history. This repetition between song and stage may, however, have reinforced the apparent accuracy of this relationship dynamic in the popular imagination.

Then as now, historical fiction could be a source for learning history; Griffin notes that 'allusions to playgoers who got their history from the plays […] span nearly the whole social spectrum'.[35] Brian Walsh describes the ways in which a play like *Richard III* refers back to its own prequels as much as to actual history, 'transform[ing] its predecessor from the status of a past play to the status of history itself'.[36] Even the supposedly authoritative chronicles differed from one another in the type of details, such as dates and names, that we would consider essential facts.[37] With this already contradictory heritage of sources, how would an average audience member be poised to recognise *James IV*'s wild departures from the historical record—especially once Bohan has framed the story as true, even assigning it a

[33] Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Vol. 3* (New York: Dover, 1965), p. 351.
[34] Child, p. 352.
[35] Griffin, p. 77.
[36] Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 148.
[37] Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare's History Plays: Rethinking Historicism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 89ff.

specific date (Induction 106)? Or a reader of the quarto, faced with a title that promises historical events? It does not seem unreasonable to surmise that some—perhaps even most—audience members could not identify its inaccuracies. By drawing upon actual historical figures, comic history plays *made* history as well as depicted it, generating new legends and anecdotes to attach to their historical characters in addition to reinforcing old ones. For audience members previously unfamiliar with the life of King James IV, Greene's play itself became history.

When Bohan identifies his tale as taking place in 1520, seven years after the historical James IV's death, he explains that the court at that time was 'overruled with parasites, misled by lust […] much like our court of Scotland this day' (Ind. 107-9). To a large extent, early modern theatregoers experienced history plays as taking place simultaneously then and now, both depicting the past and offering analogies and lessons for the present.[38] Rackin and Walsh both argue that, despite this tendency, the aim of the history play was to create a kind of historical verisimilitude, an immersive frame that could be and occasionally was disrupted by intentionally but only periodically deployed anachronism.[39] However, this reading overlooks the state of continuous anachronism in which history plays existed onstage. Beyond any audience tendency to relate historical events and people to contemporary ones, the players onstage dressed like aristocrats of the audience's own time. Actor Edward Alleyn's papers indicate that historical costumes may have been created for some characters (he notes several lost pieces intended for 'Harry the fifth'[40]), but the bulk of the players would have worn contemporary fashions that were likely reused across plays with both historical and present-day settings. Though Rackin describes the shift during the sixteenth

[38] Grant and Ravelhofer, p. 7ff.
[39] Rackin, pp. 9-12; Walsh, p. 1.
[40] S. P. Cerasano, 'An Inventory of Theatrical Apparel' in *The Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project* (King's College London and University of Reading, 2005) <https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/essays/an-inventory-of-theatrical-apparel-c-16012/>.

and seventeenth centuries towards greater historical specificity in visual art—indicating that people were perfectly aware that the Englishmen of the past did not dress identically to those of the present—there does not seem to have been any such movement onstage prior to the Civil War.[41] Anachronism was not a disruption, but the default backdrop for a history play, and one that forces us to look sceptically at the assumption that factual or temporal inaccuracies would have been either obvious or jarring.

In light of this relaxed relationship to strict historical truth overall, it is conspicuous that claims of disqualifying inaccuracy attach themselves most insistently to history plays like the historical comedies, which feature prominent fictional female characters. While such characters may seem to be an obvious transgression of the boundary between history and fiction, the presence of made-up characters who exert a considerable influence on the actions of historical figures should not be considered a disqualification from the history play form. For example, Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays are viewed as exemplary of the genre despite the fact that one of their central figures, Falstaff, is essentially fictional. Though Falstaff was originally named for the religious martyr Sir John Oldcastle, the apparent ease with which the character was separated from his supposedly factual origins (already dubious, given the lack of similarity between the historical Oldcastle and the fictional knight) and renamed highlights the tenuousness of his historicity. Yet the outsized plot influence of Falstaff and his comic compatriots, the wholly fictional misadventures of the wastrel Prince of Wales in Shakespeare's plays and *The Famous Victories of Henry V,* or the Bastard of both Shakespeare's *King John* and the anonymous *The Troublesome Reign of King John* are never seen as disqualifying the plays that contain them from the title 'history play', while Prince Edward's flirtation with Margaret of Fressingfield often is.

[41] Rackin, p. 9.

There is no inherent reason that a fictional love interest is less accurate than a fictional bastard brother, a fictional flirtation less real than a fictional robbery. But every popular narrative today reinforces the patriarchal lesson that historical worlds are filled with men. Men are the default; women must have a purpose, and thus unexpected or ahistorical female characters feel conspicuous and out of place. This assumption is closely related to the tendency, to be discussed in the next chapter, to dismiss scenes with female characters as extraneous and unnecessary to the plays' plots. Historical comedies do tend to bend most forcefully away from accepted history in relation to their female characters. One effect, therefore, of embracing a more capacious understanding of the history play in regards to historical accuracy would be to admit a type of historical narrative that makes much more room for female characters than the monarchical tragedies of Shakespeare and Marlowe manage to do. Howard proposes that *Edward III* was an opportunity for Shakespeare to intentionally stretch 'his repertory of ways to represent femininity in the history play genre, an expansion whose efforts we see in the second tetralogy'.[42] But this was not Shakespeare's innovation: it is a consistent feature of the comic historical genre in which he was working. Unlike in most of the canonical tragically-structured histories, women—specifically chaste, virtuous women—are essential to the dramaturgy of historical comedy.

Both *Edward III* and *James IV* feature pairs of contrasting female characters: the king's wife and the forbidden woman he pursues in her place. *James IV* begins with the entrance of the newly married King of Scots and Dorothea, who is officially crowned Queen of Scots during the scene (1.1.27-30). Ida, the noblewoman the King is in love with, is also present, and the scene transitions into a riddling conversation between the two, in which she expresses her disdain for both love and the court (1.1.100-38). The formality of the King's exchanges with Dorothea provides a marked contrast to the easy, comic tone of Ida's banter.

[42] Howard, p. 4.

But a flirtation that may seem harmless and appealing for a private citizen is wholly inappropriate in a monarch—much less a married one. When the King's companion Ateukin attempts to woo Ida on the king's behalf, Ida steadfastly resists, even when Ateukin reminds her that the king 'will enforce, if you resist his suit'. She replies, 'What though? The world may shame him to account, / To be a king of men and worldly pelf, / Yet hath no power to rule and guide himself' (2.1.146-9). In these lines, Greene highlights dual dangers stemming from a king's inappropriate desire. He makes the traditional comparison between king and country as embodiments of each other's health and good government—how, Ida suggests, can James be expected to control a country when he cannot control himself?—but Greene's fears are not only metaphorical. Greene rather emphasises that the danger of a wilful king lies in his royal power to enact that will however and on whomever he pleases—that is, in his ability, because he is king, to force Ida's submission. Ida does not express doubt that James is capable of raping her, only noting that he would be shamed for doing so. This frankness is an example of the play's efforts to 'establish kingship itself, rather than those forces opposed to it, [as] the most dangerous source of intemperate speech and action'.[43] And in *James IV*, as in the historical comedy subgenre overall, women are specifically highlighted as the subjects most at risk.

The titular king of *Edward III* echoes Ida's language of royal self-control as he grapples with his feelings for the married Countess of Salisbury during his preparations for war with France: 'Shall the large limit of fair Brittany / By me be overthrown, and shall I not / Master this little mansion of myself?' (3.91-3). As Howard writes, Edward's successful French campaign in the second half of the play will be proof of his reformation—but the conquest cannot be achieved without first achieving self-mastery, rejecting inappropriate lust,

[43] Cavanagh, p. 67.

and turning from the wrong woman to the right one: his wife.[44] Shakespeare also echoes Greene's reminders of the practical dangers of a King's uncontrolled will. Like Ida, the Countess highlights the impossibility of meaningfully resisting Edward's advances: 'I see your majesty so bent / That my unwillingness, my husband's love, / Your high estate nor no respect respected / Can be my help, but that your mightiness / Will overbear and awe these dear regards' (3.126-34). She tries to rebuff him by suggesting that she is willing to give in if he agrees to remove the impediments to their love—that is, to kill their current spouses. But even this ploy is not enough to deter Edward; only the Countess's threat of suicide if he does not stop pursuing her forces Edward to be 'awaked from this idle dream' (3.196). He immediately begins preparations for war. Returned to himself, he can achieve victory. The Countess's speech makes explicit, however, that had he not relented, violence would have been the only possible outcome, whether in the form of murder, rape, or suicide. Like Edward's lust, this undercurrent of violence is redirected, not purged: his romantic energies are focused on his pregnant wife and his aggression towards the French enemy, rather than his own countrywomen.

While the Countess proposes violence towards their married partners as a test, the King of Scots actually pursues this course, leading him to a battle that illuminates a key element of Greene's unusual engagement with history. Urged to murder Dorothea by the sinister Ateukin, the King is initially torn ''twixt hope and doubtful fear', but quickly convinces himself that '[a]ll likes me well that lends me hope in love' (2.2.194-9). But while Edward abandons his inappropriate lust and valiantly pursues war, the King of Scots' apparent murder of his wife causes him to be dragged unwillingly into conflict as the King of England seeks vengeance for his daughter's death. Both Edward and James are led to battlefield reunions with their proper wives, where mass destruction is delayed by the

[44] Howard, p. 9.

women's pleas for mercy—mercy for the French, in the case of Edward's wife Philippa, and in Dorothea's, for the Scottish army and the King himself. The historical James IV died in battle against the English at Flodden, as the play's full title emphasises, but Greene's James avoids an equivalent battle borne of his betrayal of his English allies, and thus also avoids this death. By invoking historical reality, Greene raises the stakes of James's repentance and draws attention to the fate that making amends and renewing his loyalty to both wife and allies allows him to escape. Edward demonstrates his reformation by winning a battle and is rewarded with the conquest of France; the King of Scots demonstrates his by avoiding a battle, and is rewarded with escaping his historical death. Jenny Sager describes *James IV*'s multiple plots and plentiful twists as a 'constant interplay between the aesthetic of shock and the aesthetic of recognition'.[45] In the King of Scots' survival, Greene activates both: a scenario recognisable from the not-so-distant past as the rough circumstances of the death of the first husband of the current queen's aunt; and the shock of its subversion, a betrayal of the promise of the play's title page and of Bohan's prologue that these events are true to history. But this duality depends on the play's self-identification as history, not pure fiction.

There is more to justify this claim than just *James IV*'s title. Rather than focusing on content, David Scott Kastan proposes that 'the history play can only be defined on the basis of dramatic form'.[46] The structural parallels between *Edward III* and *James IV* suggest that on the basis of dramatic form or dramaturgy, the generic line between these two plays—one accepted as history and one generally rejected—is in fact not very distinct at all. The difference is only in our perception. All onstage history is necessarily fictionalised: the question is merely what type and degree of fiction we deem acceptable. That *James IV*'s blend of fiction and history is seen as inappropriate is not due to any objective truth about

[45] Jenny Sager, ''When dead ones are revived': The Aesthetics of Spectacle in Robert Greene's *James IV*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 16.2 (2012) <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/16-2/sagejame.htm>.
[46] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 41.

how historical narratives must operate, but because our literary inheritance comes from a writer who applied his fictions more subtly, and who barely participated in what seems to have been a popular mode of engaging historical figures in fictional scenarios. It is a fateful coincidence that Shakespeare's most explicit participation in this mode of history-making, a mode that symbolically and dramatically centralises virtuous women, is in a play of contested canonicity. The popular view of the genre of the history play might otherwise have been very different. That *Edward III* has now generally been accepted as Shakespearean cannot amend a centuries-old understanding of the canon. It *is* at least partly Shakespeare, but in many ways, this does not matter: it has not been popularly *taken for* Shakespeare, and has not contributed to the understanding of historical dramaturgy that Shakespeare's works have built. It is the opposite case from the *Henry VI* plays, discussed below: although their collaborative nature is increasingly widely accepted, they are still fundamentally seen and understood as Shakespearean.

Although Shakespeare never wrote a historical comedy as strange as *James IV,* scholars have highlighted examples of subtler engagements in the comic historical mode within the Folio histories. Howard finds this comic dramaturgy in Prince Hal's journey through the *Henry IV* plays, but with a crucial difference: Shakespeare replaces the temptation roles usually reserved for virtuous women with corrupt (and, as discussed above, similarly fictional) men.[47] Paul Dean notes shades of historical romance in *1 Henry VI,* where Suffolk's conflicted wooing of Margaret at the end of the play evokes the same ethical dilemmas as the comic histories, a tension between propriety, duty, and lust.[48] The introduction of the Countess of Auvergne in the same play raises a similar spectre of potential romance, as one character explicitly suggests that her invitation for Talbot to visit her castle

[47] Howard, p. 11.
[48] Paul Dean, 'Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Trilogy and Elizabethan "Romance" Histories: The Origins of a Genre', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33.1 (1982) 34-48, p. 42.

will change the play itself 'unto a peaceful comic sport' (2.2.45). Both Margaret and the Countess, however, reflect Howard's assertion that 'the good women [of historical comedies] are essential to the script in ways the 'bad girls' of the *Henry VI* plays are not'.[49] While it is hard to argue that, for example, the infamous Margaret of Anjou is not essential to the story, it is true that the virtuous women of the historical comedies occupy a distinctive and integral structural role, transforming the shape of the plays' historical representations by their mere presence. With the exception of *Edward III,* this is simply not a mode in which Shakespeare directly engaged. However, these plays offer a tantalising window into what our understanding of the history play may have been, had our inheritance from the early modern dramatists reflected the period's work more broadly.

History and Englishness: *Henry VI*

In attempting to define the history play in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Histories,* Paulina Kewes eventually answers the title of her chapter—'The Elizabethan History Play: A True Genre?'—with a tentative *no*: 'What is to be gained by drawing a line between dramatic works which should be described as history plays and those which should not? If we want to understand the place and uses of history in early modern drama, we should be willing to consider any play, irrespective of its formal shape or fictional element, which represents, or purports to represent, a historical past, native or foreign, distant or recent (sometimes very recent)'.[50] A 'history play', in short, should be anything that deals with actually or supposedly real events—and thus becomes a category that might be better labelled 'non-fiction'. Other critics have argued, however, that there is in fact much to be gained by a more distinct separation between the English history play and other genres. As discussed at

[49] Howard, p. 5.
[50] Kewes, p. 188.

the beginning of this chapter, Ralf Hertel, Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, Jacqueline Vanhoutte, and other scholars as far back as E. M. W. Tillyard have seen history plays—especially Shakespeare's—as engaged in an effort to solidify a nascent sense of English national identity. Hertel's book 'understands the early modern stage as an essentially contested space in which conflicting political positions are played off against each other […inquiring] into how the imaginative work of negotiating these stances eventually affected the spectators' collective identity'.[51] The process by which this was achieved, Hertel says, 'was one of controversy and negotiation rather than of mere propaganda'.[52] But even in readings that view the plays as 'propaganda' like Tillyard, or for new historicist critics, who see the works as fundamentally dedicated to upholding the power of the state, the history plays are seen as tools of a broader project of English political self-definition. It is a project in which, perhaps unsurprisingly, women hold a complicated place.

In the comic histories, the plays' political dimension and the role of their female characters are unified. Abuse of the motherland and attempted abuse of a female subject become a single danger in these plays, each symbolised and foreshadowed by the other: the king will mistreat his country because he mistreats its women, and vice versa. For these kings, proof of their transformation lies in undertaking (or reaffirming, in both of the plays discussed above) a foreign marriage. This transformation in turn promises stability and peace for the country. But while the symbol of future domestic stability for the heroes of the historical romances is frequently union with a foreign bride, the opposite is seen to be true in Shakespeare's history plays, where foreign consorts have been read as representatives of all that threatens England and its people. Howard and Rackin argue that for Shakespeare 'there is always the anxiety that women […] will undo the patriarchal edifice' of government and

[51] Hertel, p. 1.
[52] Hertel, p. 26.

history, but that danger is exacerbated when the women are foreign: 'Aliens in the masculine domain of English historiography, the women in Shakespeare's English history plays are often quite literally alien. Female characters are often inhabitants of foreign worlds, and foreign worlds are typically characterized as feminine'. As both are threats to English patriarchal identity and supremacy, gender and foreignness neatly combine as historical antagonists.[53] Building on Howard and Rackin's arguments, Jacqueline Vanhoutte writes that '[t]he first tetralogy and *King John* never construe national threats independently of issues of gender. Shakespeare cannot reproduce motherland tropes without embracing their accompanying misogyny'.[54]

For all of these scholars, Shakespeare's foreign female consort queens cannot be separated from the plays' larger historical project of English self-definition. These characters are a nexus where history and historiography meet, combining all of the chief dangers to the English patriarchy's sense of self: not only female, but foreign; not only foreign, but frighteningly forceful. Their otherness becomes, as Lloyd Edward Kermode writes, a means by which the English identity is determined; that is, 'by its reaction to the other, and specifically its insistence on its difference from the other'.[55] But Kermode then contests this common reading, instead locating shifting patterns of exclusion and acceptance of the other in Elizabethan plays, and finding that '[t]he inevitable multi-vocality of the plays and the equivocal position of drama's political statements' make concrete ideological readings about English identity all but impossible, especially given that 'it is difficult to talk of an authoritative, native self when the self is involved in absorption, alteration, fusion, and confusion'.[56] Precisely this confusion between foreign and native is reflected in

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[53] Howard and Rackin, pp. 99, 51.
[54] Jacqueline Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and Politics* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), p. 137.
[55] Lloyd Edward Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness in Elizabethan Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 7.
[56] Kermode, p. 14.

Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays, whose vibrant and violent female characters are often seen as the epitome of Shakespeare's thematic suspicion of foreign women. As this section will show, the *Henry VI* plays in fact defy this reputation to demonstrate that foreign female characters are not exclusively used to emblematise anti-Englishness, but rather continually trouble any tidy division between native and foreign, undermining the ability of the plays to generate clear ideological meaning along national lines.

Critics often link negative depictions of foreign consort queens in early modern drama to anxieties about Queen Elizabeth I's own potential marriage, arguing that tensions over the prospect of a French or Spanish match would inescapably colour any encounter with a foreign consort character onstage. Therefore, it would be impossible for these characters to avoid this audience bias, no matter how much or little the playwright sought to activate it. As Richard Hillman writes, '[t]he danger to English royalty of intermarriage with the foreign "other" is, of course, another Elizabethan commonplace, energized by the religious question; it is foregrounded in texts as diverse as [George] Peele's *Edward I* (where the queen is a thoroughly evil Spaniard […]) and *The Gaping Gulf* of [pamphleteer Philip] Stubbs, who, in warning against "another French marriage," cites the disastrous precedent of Edward II (along with those of Richard II and Henry VI)'.[57] But though a commonplace, opinions about foreigners were not as uncomplicatedly negative as Hillman suggests—and moreover, Elizabethan plays themselves seem to demonstrate the willingness of audiences to embrace even the most potentially threatening foreign characters, under the right dramaturgical circumstances.

Hillman refers to George Peele's play *Edward I*, where the Spanish Queen Elinor of Castile is indeed a monstrous menace, not only wicked in her personal conduct but actively

[57] Richard Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 103.

dedicated to undermining England itself. Though she puts on a good show before Edward and his courtiers in the play's opening scene, by that scene's conclusion she has revealed her true domineering intents, gloating that she will put these 'headstrong Englishmen […] in a Spanish yoke' (1.256-7). She veers inconsistently between devoted love for Edward and increasingly preposterous cruelty through the rest of the play, until even her husband is forced to concede that despite his oft-repeated love for her, 'This Spanish pride 'grees not with England's prince' (10.198). One of her most frightening demands comes immediately after she at last gives birth to a son: as a reward for his birth, she demands that all Englishmen's beards and all Englishwomen's breasts be cut off. She thus strikes, Vanhoutte writes, at the 'very heart of Englishness' by threatening the outward signs of England's wholesome masculinity and virtuous maternity alike.[58] The particularly violent threat to Englishwomen is mirrored by her treatment of the Mayoress of London, whom Elinor despises for what she perceives as undue pride (3.126-143). Elinor's revenge is to murder the Mayoress with an adder (15.20-38). With the threat to cut off English women's breasts, Elinor's fury moves beyond unpleasant arrogance or symbolic emasculation in the form of shaved beards, but physical aggression that is aimed at literally cutting off English maternal procreation, culminating in an actual murder of a recent mother in the Mayoress. Her antagonism is explicitly framed as a Spanish assault on England: Elinor wants to undertake her mutilations in order to 'give your English pride a Spanish brave' (10.210), and the courtiers fume that the request is 'a Spanish fit' (10.212), a result of the Queen having been '[b]red up in court of pride, brought up in Spain' (10.261). Though references to her origins recur throughout the play, Scene 10 has the highest concentration of them, and it is surely no accident that these reminders of her foreignness are clustered around one of Elinor's most outrageous actions.

[58] Vanhoutte, p. 139.

But *Edward I* is not Elinor's only appearance on the early modern English stage, and murderousness is not her default mode. In the final scenes of the comic history *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,* Prince Edward forsakes his fruitless and nearly-violent pursuit of the commoner Margaret of Fressingfield in order to undertake the marriage his father has arranged for him. His bride, described repeatedly as 'lovely', 'beauteous', 'sweet', and 'matchless', is a dutiful and gentle Spanish princess, protesting her love for Edward in highly conventional terms: thanks to his portrait and word of his noble deeds, 'I lik'd thee 'fore I saw thee; now I love / And so as in so short a time I may; / Yet so as time shall never break' (9.193-5). At play's end, Edward's father demands that the sorcerer Friar Bacon reveal 'what shall grow from Edward and his queen'. Bacon replies, 'From forth the royal garden of a king / Shall flourish out so rich and fair a bud, / Whose brightness shall deface proud Phœbus' flower, / And over-shadow Albion with her leaves'. Though there will be a period of war before this time comes, afterwards 'peace from heaven shall harbour in those leaves / That gorgeous beautify this matchless flower' (16.45-56). This lovely foreign princess, prophesied to bring forth peace and beauty, is Princess Elinor of Castile. These contrasting depictions strongly suggest that, whichever version of Elinor a given audience member may have personally preferred, the wild murderess or the beautiful bride, they were content to accept the character in the terms presented by a given play. Likewise, a playwright could assume that negative audience feeling towards the mere fact of a foreign consort would not wholly disrupt the play's happy ending, or the moral lesson that the kings and princes in question—in this case, Prince Edward—have made the correct choice of partner at last.

While the possibility of Queen Elizabeth's marriage may have made anxieties about foreigners particularly keen, the dates of her prominent courtships do not match up with the plays with which these pressures are commonly critically associated. Queen Margaret of Anjou in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays is often linked with concerns about a potential

marriage between Queen Elizabeth and the French Duke of Alençon (who later also held the title of Duke of Anjou, emphasising the potential connection). Linda Gregerson highlights the 'general outcry' against the Alençon match as an animating factor behind Margaret and other such vicious foreign consort characters in the early 1590s.[59] But even at the earliest proposed date of composition for the first of the *Henry VI* plays, the protracted Alençon courtship had concluded nearly a decade prior. By the time Greene wrote about the upstart young writer with a 'tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide', an apparent allusion to Shakespeare and his Margaret, Queen Elizabeth I was nearly sixty years old. It would be strange for a playwright to actively seek to play upon decade-old anxieties, and equally odd for audiences to still be unavoidably plagued by them. Rather, it seems reasonable to assume that, as the queen aged and anticipation of her marriage morphed into anxiety about succession, the immediate negative resonance of theatrical depictions of foreign matches would have faded, and the mere presence of a foreign marriage onstage would not be enough to conjure fear and hatred in spectators.

In the cases of Margaret and Joan la Pucelle—not a consort, but generally seen as symbolically linked to Margaret as an antagonistic Frenchwoman—fear and hatred of their foreignness do seem, in large part, to be the intended audience responses.[60] But their negative traits are not consistently linked to their French nationalities. Indeed, the characters themselves straddle the line between French and English, complicating the play's ability to nationalistically self-define through comparison with or contrast to the foreign other. Though Peele's monstrous Elinor may seem to be a prototype for Queen Margaret based on the latter's reputation, the associations the *Henry VI* plays actually draw between Margaret's French background and the danger she poses to English peace are not nearly as direct or as

[59] Linda Gregerson, 'French Marriages and the Protestant Nation in History Plays' in *A Companion to Shakespeare: The Histories,* ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 246-262.
[60] Hillman, p. 132.

insistent as in Peele's play. The largely Francophobic insults most commonly quoted by critics—'She-wolf of France', 'false Frenchwoman', and the famous 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide'—are not spoken until Act 1, Scene 4 of *3 Henry VI.* Even then, Margaret's French origins are notably only highlighted by her enemies. While even Edward I ruefully suggests in the end that Elinor's Spanish heritage makes her prideful, Margaret's allies easily find means to view her actions in a positive light. And unlike the traditional association of the Spanish and pride, Margaret's negative behaviour is not immediately evocative of early modern French stereotypes. A. J. Hoenselaars describes her 'lascivious behaviour with Suffolk, her impatience, her scheming, and her vengefulness' as recalling 'current cliché assumptions about the French'. But her 'cruelty and masculinity'—precisely the traits she displays to provoke the most famous stream of xenophobic invective directed against her—are not, suggesting that, Hoenselaars suggests, 'Shakespeare does not mean his audience to automatically subscribe to the Duke of York's facile definition of her'.[61] Despite being the only foreigner in the English court of *2* and *3 Henry VI*, her vices are never depicted as unique; indeed, they are regularly matched in type and extremity by her English enemies and allies like. Even her crowning moment of cruelty, the taunting and murder of the Duke of York, has its English counterpart when York's sons callously murder Margaret's son, Prince Edward, before her eyes.

Joan la Pucelle occupies a similarly blurred position in *1 Henry VI,* highlighting the nuance that lies beneath a character that has been taken as an unequivocal example of the plays' intersections of sexism and xenophobia. Joan is indisputably French and presents an immediate threat to English interests, but even she shifts back and forth across the supposed line between English and French, reflecting an instability of identity that the play does not

[61] A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: a Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), p. 35.

seek to clarify. One of her first lines is to identify the Virgin Mary, the epitome of foreign popery, as the source of her power: 'Heaven and Our Lady gracious hath it pleased / To shine upon my contemptible estate' (1.2.74). Fear of foreignness was inextricable from fears of Catholicism in this period, and this explicit and immediate association of Joan with French Catholicism seems straightforwardly threatening from an English perspective.

Antagonism between England and France was centuries old, but anxiety related to foreigners took on a new tenor in the post-Reformation era due to England's position as a Protestant nation surrounded by potential Catholic aggressors. Though written as a warning against Elizabeth's French courtship, the majority of the pamphlet *The Gaping Gulf* is dedicated to outlining the evils of Catholicism. The anonymous pamphlet *The Lamentation of England*, published about twenty years earlier, expresses concern that Queen Mary had inherited her mother's Spanish blood—a danger not because of negative stereotypes about the Spanish, but because Spaniards were Catholic.[62] But the relationship between France and Catholicism was in flux at this time. There was hope that the Protestant Henry of Navarre would win the throne of France; in 1593, he frustrated English ambitions by converting to Catholicism in order to claim the French crown. However, even after Henry's conversion, France was seen as the lesser of two evils in relation to Spain. Jean-Christophe Mayer writes that the ongoing French Wars of Religion meant that 'England began to consider France less as her traditional foe (one whose involvement in Scottish politics had been a source of resentment) and more as a potential ally in her conflict with Spain', a stance clearly reflected in Elizabeth's lengthy consideration of the Alençon marriage. Henslowe's diary, Mayer notes, also reflects a particular audience interest in French political and historical plays, works in which the French were not solely portrayed as caricatured villains.[63] English audiences

[62] Kermode, p. 27.
[63] Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Representing France and the French in Early Modern English Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 33.

appeared willing, in other words, to embrace the complexity of England's relationship with France, not merely loathe depictions of their traditional enemies on sight.

Even Joan's frank Catholicism may not have been as aggressively threatening as we generally assume. Catholicism itself held a complex position in England, and the Virgin Mary was one of many lingering cultural remnants of the former church. The virgin iconography formerly associated with Mary and invoked by Joan was frequently appropriated and reapplied to Queen Elizabeth herself, particularly as she grew older, and the promise of an eventual marriage faded. Many of the other classical and Biblical figures to whom Joan is compared—notably Astraea and Deborah—were also commonly poetically equated with Elizabeth.[64] Leah S. Marcus highlights how these resonances would have complicated Joan's reception, calling to mind through this martial Frenchwoman, devoted to protecting her country, the queen who was alternately (or simultaneously) loved and scorned by her people.[65] But loved or hated, Elizabeth was unquestionably English, thus muddying Joan's status as emblematically French.

Indeed, Joan occasionally appears to distance herself from her French compatriots and implicitly link herself with the English instead, most notably when she persuades the Duke of Burgundy to abandon the English and return to the French. She celebrates her success in converting him with a sarcastic aside: 'Done like a Frenchman—turn and turn again' (3.3.85). Singling Burgundy out as French in this way—and smugly characterising the French as fickle—seems to suggest that she herself is not. The gesture of the aside further allies her with the English audience. Other alliances with the English emerge as Joan distinguishes herself as devoted and courageous in comparison to the Frenchmen who follow her. If foreigners function in history plays to define the English identity through contrast, the French

[64] Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1989), p. 137.
[65] Marcus, p. 53ff.

specifically tended to serve as a feminine contrast to the manly English. Andrew M. Kirk highlights how Joan operates as a semi-subversion of that strategy, 'clearly out-perform[ing] those who should be her natural superiors, ironically joining herself with the English in highlighting French royal inconstancy, weakness, and passivity'.[66] But she also outdoes the English in her ability to unify her countrymen, to the extent of luring the defected Burgundy back to her cause. She frequently enters immediately on the heels of scenes depicting the deeply divided state of the English. Such juxtaposition suggests that if the French are to be criticised for relying on the leadership of a woman (and, as it transpires, one aided by demonic forces), the English are no less to blame for being weak and divided enough to be beaten by her.

In this changeability, Kirk finds similarities between Joan and the allegorical figure of Fortune. Like the dizzying back-and-forth of success and defeat that the play's battle scenes depict, Fortune supports and abandons at will those who rely on her. Kirk suggests that the association of Joan with Fortune 'allow[ed] the English audience to comprehend events that seemed inconsistent with providence', such as Joan's temporary, demonically-inspired victories over the English forces.[67] But I argue that Shakespeare is not interested in smoothing over such inconsistency. Evenly the most devoutly providentially-minded Englishmen of the 1590s would have known perfectly well that, whatever the rightness of the English cause and the perfidy of the French, England's holdings in France were ultimately lost, and had yet to be regained. However, the association of Joan with Fortune does emphasise her symbolic dual alliances: truly neither French nor English, she represents simultaneously French luck and English division, French deceit and English weakness. She is

[66] Andrew M. Kirk, *The Mirror of Confusion: the Representation of French History in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Garland, 1996), p. 136.
[67] Kirk, p. 134-5.

not, in short, a nationalistic emblem of the enemies of England, but rather represents the multiplicity of forces that sometimes allow an apparently right cause to fail.

History and the Stage: Margaret of Anjou

Unpicking Joan's complicated web of associations demonstrates that the power of Shakespeare's historical female characters often lies outside of the play texts themselves. While the examples above draw primarily on the broader Elizabethan political culture to find important resonances within the character, another key extra-textual realm to consider is that of the stage itself. Many essential aspects of these characters' and plays' engagement with national identity only become legible when one looks beyond the confines of the printed page to consider the conditions of early modern performance. As Kermode suggests, it is these texts' identity specifically as theatrical works—an art form that is particularly resistant to unified readings, both due to the multi-vocality of the onstage characters and the diversity of understanding and experience contained within any single audience—that makes their ideological positions all but impossible to concretely define.[68] *Henry VI*'s Queen Margaret of Anjou exemplifies the ways in which extra-textual elements of the theatrical culture, including considerations of the practical processes of print and performance, complicate and occasionally undermine the understandings of a character that seem obvious in textually-focused readings. She is a particularly instructive case-in-point in relation to the above argument about the history play's association with defining English national identity, as many of the features that call into question Margaret's reputation as Shakespeare's most iconic foreign threat can only be located within the conditions of early modern performance.

[68] Kermode, p. 14.

One relationship in particular gains new resonance when considered in terms of performance: that of Margaret and her son Edward. Their close connection complicates any simple reading of foreign consorts, and Margaret in particular, as destabilising forces of evil. While Peele's Elinor dies revealing that all of her children but one are illegitimate (and that one will become Edward II, whose famously troubled reign was dramatised by Christopher Marlowe at the same time Peele was depicting that of his father), Margaret's son Edward emerges from the start of *3 Henry VI* as a welcome contrast to his weak and indecisive father. Providing such a comparison to insufficiently masculine men is a common function of child characters in Shakespeare's history plays,[69] but in this instance, it also forges an association between mother and son, as both serve as ironic contrasts to King Henry's weakness. Their supporters see this as an unequivocally good thing: 'Women and children of so high a courage, / And warriors faint? Why, 'twere a perpetual shame', their ally Oxford declares. 'O brave young prince, thy famous grandfather / Doth live again in thee' (5.4.50-3). Oxford links Margaret and Edward as exemplars of courage, hope that England may yet see another Henry V. This promise and its specific connection to Margaret were underscored in Shakespeare's Globe's 2019 production of a conflated version of the *Henry VI* plays, where this scene was staged as a surreal fantasy. Entering to a bare stage, Margaret delivered a speech attempting to rally her followers in the wake of a massive defeat, initially with a frantic, defeated air. As the speech went on, she grew in confidence, and seemed to assume control over the materials of the stage itself: the lights brightened, triumphant music began to play, her followers multiplied and acquired giant Lancaster banners to wave—in preview performances, the same flags that were used in the same company's production of *Henry V* (though these were ultimately replaced for fireproofing purposes). The scene culminated with Oxford's line,

[69] Rebecca Ann Bach, 'Manliness Before Individualism: Masculinity, Effeminacy, and Homoerotics in Shakespeare's History Plays' in *A Companion to Shakespeare: The Histories,* ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 220-245, p. 236.

quoted above (reassigned in this production to another lord), while Margaret gazed, overjoyed and incredulous, at what she had managed to conjure. Her position in the centre of the stage, looking ecstatically upwards and lit from above, emphasised the moment as her triumphant fantasy, not her son's—but praise of her son as the new Henry V formed a climactic element of the realisation of her dream.

The two boy players in the roles of Margaret and her son would themselves have been matched through their shared status as company apprentices, and traces of a further extra-textual partnership are present within the text itself. Margaret and Edward as pair seem to be a clear example of an actor training partnership at work, their scenes displaying traits that suggest the role of Edward was created to support a boy player still learning his trade. For Prince Edward's first several scenes, Margaret is the only character to provide cues for his lines, and the only time in the play that he enters or exits without her, he is carried on as a captive and off as a corpse. His speeches throughout the play are never more than four lines long, until he is at last given a ten-line speech in Act 5, Scene 4, followed shortly thereafter by his death scene, his first and only involvement in the kind of stychomythia that demands attentive listening for several cue lines in quick succession. This growing complexity over the course of the play, buttressed by the constant presence and primary support of a single fellow player, is the precise pattern of textual 'scaffolding' that Evelyn Tribble describes as a means of training and supporting novice players.[70] Such continual linking of characters is inevitably visible onstage, as the practical demands of scaffolding require creating dramatic scenarios that allow the players—and thus, their characters—to remain paired.

Intriguingly, unlike the examples of potential adult actor/apprentice actor partnerships that Tribble highlights, *3 Henry VI* features a presumably more senior and experienced boy,

[70] Evelyn Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 138.

one entrusted with a large and complex role like Margaret, helping to train a more junior one. The continual onstage coupling borne of this partnership draws attention to the characters' similarities: they enter together, she sometimes verbally guides his movements, and, because Margaret provides the majority of Edward's cues, his speech frequently follows on the heels of hers. Setting aside unknowable details of specific company apprenticeship structures, the boy playing Edward could just as plausibly have been tied to the actor playing King Henry, just as Edward himself could have chosen to follow his father instead of his mother—but the actor was not, and the character does not. *3 Henry VI* begins by dividing Edward from Henry and allying him with his mother instead, as Henry disinherits his son in favour of the Duke of York. Edward turns this symbolic severing into a literal one, vowing not to see his father until he can reclaim his inheritance—and thus affirmation of his connection to Henry—in battle: ''till then I'll follow her' (1.1.263). King Edward IV characterises mother and son as not merely linked, but interchangeable when he frames his murder of the prince as an act of violence against a substitute for the queen herself, with Prince Edward serving as 'the likeness of this railer here' (5.5.38)[71]. The visible traces of actor training make Edward doubly Margaret's likeness, for she is his tutor twice over: one boy player of another, and Margaret of Edward, raising him to be the king his father could not be—but may look a little like the king she herself would have been. Explicitly noting this likeness as a cause of Prince Edward's death highlights the ambivalence of a comparison with his 'she-wolf' mother. But as the Duke of York's dying invective so vividly demonstrates, what makes Margaret's behaviour particularly monstrous in the eyes of her onstage contemporaries—and perhaps the audience—is that a woman undertakes it. In a boy, as Rebecca Ann Bach's discussion of boy characters illustrates, such audacity could be figured instead as precocious courage.[72]

[71] Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 19.
[72] Bach, p. 236.

Edward, then, may be the ideal mixture of his parents: his mother's aggression in his father's form. Unlike Peele's Elinor, whose wickedness is attested by her many bastard children and the ultimate weakness of the heir she bears, Margaret has a hopeful son. And from her first words in *3 Henry VI*, she acts in his name and constantly in his company. The personal ambition she expresses in *2 Henry VI* is not clearly in evidence in this sequel. Some audience members would certainly recall it, and remember, too, that her previous adultery could render Prince Edward's parentage suspect. But no such suspicion is ever raised in *3 Henry VI* itself.

It may seem strange to consider these two *Henry VI* plays, and Margaret's character as established within them, separately from one another. But while the *Henry VI* plays have been performed almost exclusively in chronological cycles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this was not the case in the early modern period. Emrys Jones argues that 'Shakespeare could not have expected an identical audience for each of the three plays', and so did not write them with that assumption in mind.[73] Today, plays are generally programmed for runs varying in length from a few weeks to, in the commercial sector, many years, after which time they generally are not revived on the same scale for some time. In the early modern period, plays would recur periodically, every few weeks or months, sometimes for years. But Henslowe's Diary reveals an inconsistent policy regarding the presentation of multi-part plays sequentially. For example, on 19 July 1594, Henslowe records the debut of *The Second Part of Godfrey of Bullen*. On 26 July comes just plain *Godfrey,* and then another *Second Part* on 6 August. *Godfrey* pops up through the remainder of the diary's records, but never on two sequential days. In contrast, there are the two parts of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine,* which were frequently performed one immediately after the other, or with a day in between. But sometimes they were not: on 15 September 1595, *Part One* was performed, but never followed by *Part Two.* On 25 October 1595, the first of a two-part play called

[73] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 129.

Hercules was performed. Though it was usually also performed sequentially, in this instance, *Part Two* did not appear until 2 November.[74] We cannot know whether the *Henry VI* plays were treated more like *Tamburlaine* or more like *Godfrey* (though if the play Henslowe records as *Harry the 6* is one of Shakespeare's, it is never joined by its sequels and/or prequels, which could suggest that at least one of the plays spent several years standing alone). But I argue, like Jones, that these patterns make it impossible to assume that every audience member would have seen all of the plays sequentially: perhaps they were never at leisure to see plays two days in a row, or perhaps they just kept missing the staggered parts. We have reason to think that the *Henry VI* plays were popular because of outside references like Greene's, but we don't know exactly which of them, or for how long.

Both Henslowe's Diary and the extant canon offer examples of plays that left their sequels or prequels behind, becoming successes independently. John Jowett suggests that *Richard III* could be one such play, its extended theatrical life perhaps leading to rewrites to accommodate for the fact that its three prequels had fallen out of the repertory, and thus the audience could not reliably be expected to remember the information contained within them.[75] In a podcast recording of a 2009 talk at the Huntington Library, Emma Smith makes a parallel argument regarding the print versions of the histories, highlighting evidence from printers and readers strongly suggesting that even once collected into the 1623 Folio, the histories did not tend to be read as the chronological series we are accustomed to taking them for. Prior to the publication of the collected plays in folio, Smith reminds us, the separately-published quartos and their distinct print histories suggest that readers approached the plays separately, and likely only purchased the part of the series they liked best.[76] In addition, the

[74] Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary,* ed. by R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 18-25.
[75] John Jowett, 'Introduction' in *Richard III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 121.
[76] Emma Smith, 'The Politics of Shakespeare's Folio Histories,' *Shakespeare and His World* podcast, Huntington Library, 25 September 2009.

plays did not receive their obviously sequential numbering until their 1623 Folio publication; in quarto, their titles are *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster,* which was followed not by the Second Part of the Contention, but by *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York.* While we have been trained by recent print, performance, and scholarly history to view these plays as an intimately linked sequence, the circumstances of original print and performance provide strong reason to think many early modern audience members and readers would not have seen them that way.

With these circumstances in mind, it becomes important to consider Margaret's four depictions not only as a singular character arc, but as four discrete characters who may well have been conceived and encountered entirely separately. Thus divided, the Margaret of *3 Henry VI* is introduced and continually framed as a fiercely devoted mother, defined (perhaps ironically, in the view of those who are accustomed to linking her with her actions of *2 Henry VI*) by her loyalty to the English throne as represented by her son. Her presence is not nearly as hopeful in *2 Henry VI*, where her appearance in the play's first scene sends the male courtiers into striking series of staggered exits, by which the various layers of faction and division in the court are revealed. This revelation also, however, draws attention to the fact that Margaret is merely a new expression for, not the root cause of, the internecine strife. As she and Suffolk work steadily to undermine the strength of the Lord Protector in order to control King Henry for themselves, Margaret looks much more like Peele's Elinor in her determined erosion of English values as embodied by the noble-minded Duke Humphrey. But the preceding events have made it clear that her aggression is, as Felicity Dunworth writes, 'the product of the breakdown of masculine relations, rather than its source'.[77]

[77] Felicity Dunworth, *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 101.

The relationship of *1 Henry VI* to the other two instalments in the series has been the subject of debate, and this uncertainty raises interesting questions about how early modern audiences may have perceived Margaret's appearance at the end of *1 Henry VI.* The current consensus is that *1 Henry VI* post-dates its sequels, and was perhaps written to capitalise on their popularity. Margaret herself may well have been a key element of this popularity, as Robert Greene's much-quoted 'tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide' jab at Shakespeare has been seen to suggest.[78] In this case, Margaret's one-scene cameo at the end of *1 Henry VI* could have been one of gleeful anticipation of the wickedness to come, her threatening nature requiring no explicit introduction because it was already well known to habitual theatregoers—though still unknown to others, as discussed above. However, the resurgence of the plays' popularity from the mid-twentieth century onwards has come almost exclusively in cycle form, linking or adapting the plays (with or without *Richard III* as the concluding instalment) into a series performed by a shared cast in order to create continuity of character and story. When the plays are performed or read in a chronological cycle, Margaret theoretically enters to a clean slate. The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2000 production offered her no such opportunity: by doubling the role with Joan, and having Margaret emerge from the flames of Joan's execution in a scarlet gown, her danger to the English was plain from the start. But without the context of Margaret's future acts, it is not at all obvious that her appearance near the end of *1 Henry VI* should be read as threatening beyond the fact that she is French. While it is certainly possible to perform her and Suffolk's first encounter as laden with knowing innuendo, it is equally possible to read Suffolk as lascivious and Margaret as stubbornly or innocently resisting his implications—what Carol Chillington Rutter describes as 'an object lesson in objectification', evocative of the historical comedies

[78] Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 71.

discussed above, and not a shared flirtation.[79] Suffolk himself is full of blustering ambition, but Margaret comes across as his tool, not his accomplice, in the closing line of the play: 'I shall rule both her, the King, and realm' (5.6.108). The final scene of ominous marriage negotiations takes place without Margaret there. Her absence makes explicit that Margaret herself is not the problem; the issue is rather the marriage terms that the male, English characters propose and accept: Margaret's lack of dowry, the recompense her father demands, and most of all, the breaking of Henry's betrothal to the Duke of Armagnac's daughter. This last fact emphasises that the danger of the match does not lie in its foreignness, but in the political dealings surrounding it. Thus, a character that seems to be a microcosm of the history play's purpose—the definition and defence of masculine Englishness against all that is female and foreign and thus threatens to undermine it—becomes distinctly more complex once integrated with the realities of early modern print, performance, and practice.

While characterisation as 'threatening foreigners' is a generalisation about the women of the *Henry VI* plays, and Margaret in particular, that seems accurate on the surface, it makes assumptions about audience knowledge and associations that simply are not universally true. Further, it is a characterisation undermined by the complexity of Shakespeare's multi-vocal depiction of history. Recognising the contradictory and layered relationship these female characters have both to their foreignness and to English interests demands grappling with the material conditions of the history play as a specific form of artistic and historical engagement, one whose meaning cannot be read in purely textual terms—though even at the textual level, these roles' interactions with emerging ideas of Englishness, and contemporary tensions regarding religion, marriage, and foreigners, render them far more complex than mere emblems against which English identity can be defined by contrast. By shunting the

[79] Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Of tyger's hearts and players' hides' in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories,* ed. by Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves, and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2006), p. 186.

female characters out of the category of Englishness, and thus to the margins of what is perceived to be the history play's purpose, these critical commonplaces insist on female exclusion as an essential feature of the genre.

History and Tragedy: *King John, Henry VIII,* and *Richard III*

Insisting that female characters are fundamentally removed from the heart of the history plays' concerns extends beyond the question of foreigners versus the English. The character of Constance in *King John,* for example, seems to make both critics and fellow characters impatient. She is a constant disruptive presence, never more than in her famous series of speeches lamenting her son Arthur's capture by John's forces. These speeches are a theatrical coup, grinding the scene to a halt and forcing audience attention and sympathy through her powerful and poetic language about grief. Though the other characters find her behaviour mortifying, this affective power is a source of immense potential strength in terms of audience sympathy. Marguerite A. Tassi argues that the ability of Constance and other righteous antagonists to 'give audiences an emotionally intense experience' is an essential aspect of their power and appeal.[80] John Kerrigan, on the other hand, finds Constance 'absurd' and 'altogether trying', and that 'the switch-off point for audiences is imminent when 'hystericized' femininity forces itself on the attention'.[81] Perhaps most tellingly, Constance is consistently described in criticism as 'mad', and her scene lamenting Arthur's loss as a 'mad scene' despite the fact that it bears no linguistic resemblance to Shakespeare's other scenes depicting madness, and that her speeches are entirely linear and rational. But in the eyes of critics, extreme female emotion and 'madness' become inextricable: both are

[80] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 73.
[81] John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint': A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 55, 65.

inappropriate disruptions to the orderly progress of the scene and of history, and can only be explained by shunting them out of the category of reasonable behaviour entirely.[82] In describing Constance as mad, critics are quoting the Cardinal, whose assessment Constance directly denies (3.4.3-4). Katharine Goodland wonders why 'critical responses *to* the play sound so much like the critical responses of characters *in* the play' and views Constance's emotional outpourings as 'seductive […] for Constance, the characters in the play, and perhaps the audience'.[83] Despite Kerrigan's certainty that audiences, broadly put, dislike Constance, performance history does not support this assertion. Tillyard, for example, finds Constance to be 'the second great character of the play: partly perhaps because Mrs Siddons played her with enthusiastic devotion'.[84] This is in reference to English actress Sarah Siddons, who did indeed make Constance one of her signature roles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, creating an association so enduring that Tillyard could allude to her without explanation over a century later.

Tillyard finds it impossible to separate the appeal of Constance from the appeal of the actress who most famously played her. A.J. Piesse suggests that the early production history of the play is largely a history of who has played Constance, and how—the character is inseparable from the famous actresses who have taken on the role. Like Margaret, she seems to be character who can only be fully understood in performance. Siddons' performances in the role were so renowned, some spectators would come just to see her, departing after her final scene, thus completely divorcing the character from the wider play.[85] Popular eighteenth century actress Susannah Cibber frequently performed opposite David Garrick, but not when

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[82] See, for example, A. R. Braunmuller, 'Introduction' in *King John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Deborah T. Curren-Acquino, '*King John:* A Modern Perspective' in *King John* for the Folger Shakespeare <http://shakespeare.folger.edu>.
[83] Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: from the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 120, 126.
[84] Tillyard, p. 299.
[85] A. J. Piesse, '*King John*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays,* ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126-140, pp. 127-8.

she played Constance: he did not like to play John. Thus, as Fiona Ritchie notes, when scholars 'focus on the works of Shakespeare which Garrick popularised with his acting [they] miss some of the plays such as *King John*, which proved enormously popular in the eighteenth century repertoire as a result of the talented actresses who brought them to life'.[86] Constance was not Cibber's consolation prize for supporting Garrick in another leading turn, but a star vehicle all her own. To a certain extent, this disruptive association with celebrity is fitting: Constance is written to break through at moments the other characters perceive as inappropriate, to demand the attention she believes is her due, whether or not others agree. But it is a disruption that critics find uncomfortable for precisely the reasons actresses find it appealing: she represents the intrusion of a highly emotional mode into the centre of a historical drama, an intrusion that shifts the play's poles of power by redirecting audience sympathy.

Constance is not alone in Shakespeare's canon of history plays, though such disruptive female characters tend to be found in plays that are no longer particularly popular. Sarah Siddons, for example, claimed Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII* as one of her favourite roles. However, strong audience affection for Katharine can awkwardly unbalance the sympathy for King Henry VIII required to uphold the play's triumphant final scene, read by most scholars as unambiguous Tudor propaganda.[87] Though we tend to associate eighteenth-century Shakespeare with heavy adaptation, both *King John* and *Henry VIII* were, aside from (sometimes extreme) cutting for length, largely left in their original shapes. I suggest these emotional female characters may have been the reason for both plays' structural preservation, as their scenes of suffering and firm moral stances recall the heroines of the then-popular 'she-tragedy' genre. Considering these plays within the periods in which they were most

[86] Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 41-2.
[87] Jay L. Halio, 'Introduction' in *Henry VIII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 50, 36.

popular illuminates the artistic conditions under which they are considered successful, which points in turn to fundamental features of their dramaturgy. In the case of *King John, Henry VIII,* and ultimately *Richard III,* it is a dramaturgy within which disruptive, emotionally expressive female characters and the depiction of history prove fundamentally intertwined.

The eighteenth century revival of Shakespeare that is now most commonly associated with David Garrick was equally brought about by powerful actresses, including Hannah Pritchard, Catherine Clive, and Susannah Cibber, who turned at first to Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines such as Portia, Viola, and Rosalind as vehicles for their star power and still-novel sexual appeal.[88] The birth of she-tragedy slightly predates this Shakespearean revival, first appearing in the 1680s. In these plays, 'action revolves around a central female character who suffers for most of the play and dies pathetically at the end'. They emerged, as Jean I. Marsden writes, from an era in which audiences were increasingly unwilling to accept heroism based in impeccable moral goodness, but profound feeling was found to offer an affecting and effective substitute.[89] Direct appropriations of the she-tragedy style can be found in eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's works, including Colley Cibber's adaptation of *King John,* where both Arthur (re-written as a trouser role and played by Cibber's granddaughter) and Constance take up the central, impotent but emotional role associated with the genre.[90] But echoes of the form can be found in the unadapted texts as well. Neither Constance nor Katherine are ever quite as pathetic as the traditional she-tragedy heroine, but their grand scenes of emotional distress offer a similar means by which audience members can locate themselves in the plays' muddy moral landscapes, providing emotional appeal to replace pristine morality—and thus a site for audience sympathy that the plays

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[88] Ritchie, p. 110.
[89] Jean I. Marsden, 'Tragedy and Varieties of Serious Drama' in *A Companion to Restoration Drama,* ed. by Susan J. Owen (London: Blackwell, 2001), 228-242, p. 237.
[90] Elaine M. McGirr, 'Shakespeare, Cibber, and the troublesome *King John*' in *Shakespeare in Stages: New Theatre Histories,* ed. by Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22-36, p. 30.

otherwise lack.[91] The popularity of she-tragedies was inextricably linked to the power and fame of the actresses who starred in them; companies without a dominant female star tended not to do them.[92] Thus, both Shakespeare and she-tragedy straddle onstage past and offstage present, articulating a vision of history that is rooted in the experiences of women because it is inseparable from the influence of the actresses filling the female roles.

Like the historical comedies discussed above, one might argue that these plays' association with she-tragedy suggests that they were valued not as histories, but fundamentally as tragedies that happened to have historical trappings. But *King John* and *Henry VIII*'s heyday overlapped with another theatrical trend that explicitly demonstrates their perceived value as legitimate engagements with historical storytelling: archaeological theatre. This was a production style interested in historical accuracy and intense naturalistic detail in both scenic and costume design, and which frequently interpolated scenes of opulent pageantry such as processions and coronations, as well as massive battle scenes. These scenes were sometimes not originally found in Shakespeare, but were added to enhance the plays' fidelity to history. The most famous example of this style is Herbert Beerbohm Tree's lavish 1899 *King John*, which heavily cut the text to make room for several added battle sequences and a scene of John signing the Magna Carta. But Tree's production was the apex, not the origin, of this trend.[93] The Kemble siblings—Sarah Siddons and her two brothers, all celebrated actors—created a similar version of *Henry VIII* in 1811, often considered the first attempt at prioritising historically accurate sets and costumes in production. Their *King John* of 1823 likewise explicitly advertised its fidelity to history.[94] Eugene M. Waith speculates about this overlap between actress and archaeology in the case of *King John,* wondering if

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[91] Tassi, p. 73.
[92] Marsden, p. 238.
[93] Braunmuller, p. 86.
[94] Ellen Lockhart, 'Staging Shakespeare's History Plays: The Past as Tone and Material, 1779-1830' in *Staging History: 1780-1840,* ed. by Michael Burden, Wendy Heller, Jonathan Hicks, and Ellen Lockhart (Oxford: Bodelian Library, Oxford University, 2016), pp. 34, 37.

Constance's appeal 'may have been heightened for the spectator by the visual contrast between her solitary figure and the comings and goings of the French, Austrian, and English armies'.[95] But the Kembles' production of *Henry VIII* emphasised precisely the opposite, increasing the elaborate shows of deference shown to Siddons as Katherine, embedding her more firmly in the richly portrayed historical context.[96] It bears repeating that the same plays became the vessels for both of these trends: both archaeological theatre and displays of powerful female celebrity in the style of sentimental tragedy. What seems like an awkward or unexpected coincidence may in fact be more deliberate than we realise. Perhaps we must understand the vogues for female pathos and for historical pageantry not as contrasting, but as complementary, the former an essential element of the latter.

These previously popular Shakespearean histories offer a reminder that at one time, the form of historical narrative that was not only widely accepted but apparently preferred was centred on female anger and sadness, on women who express their discontent in highly emotive terms. The fact that these particular histories were rarely more popular than when showcase scenes of female suffering were in vogue implies that these 'hysterical' scenes are an essential element of the plays' historical dramaturgy, and sincere appreciation of such scenes is fundamental to the plays' success. Waith suggests that the overall shift in attention to the Bastard as the favoured character in *King John* is 'characteristic of a shift in sensibility' towards self-awareness and satire: 'even his patriotism, less appealing to some of our contemporaries, can be seen as tempered by an ironic view. Nothing tempers the passions of Constance; we turn away from her "gorgeous affliction" with a certain embarrassment and impatience'.[97] Though Waith wrote this over forty years ago, the sentiment lingers, as

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[95] Eugene M. Waith, '*King John* and the Drama of History,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), 192–211, p. 207.
[96] Shearer West, 'Siddons, Celebrity and Regality: Portraiture and the Body of the Ageing Actress' in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000,* ed. by Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 191-213, p. 204.
[97] Waith, pp. 199-200.

demonstrated by Kerrigan's analysis quoted above, and by former *Guardian* theatre critic Michael Billington's comment in a 2012 review that Constance is 'often a Niagara of self-pity', unpleasant to watch.[98] The key to these plays seems to be not only understanding their scenes of affect as essential to their story, but to their historical dramaturgy. An era obsessed with historical accuracy in Shakespeare, to the point of adding in 'missing' scenes such as the signing of the Magna Carta, did not cut out these speeches and characters as unnecessary and frivolous, but rather framed them as the human centrepiece of the historical drama.

James Robinson Planché worked with the Kembles to research their costumes and to produce books showcasing their meticulous work on *King John* and *Henry VIII.* In 1830, he produced a third costume book that was not explicitly linked to any production, though it was of a play Siddons and her brothers had all appeared in: *Richard III.*[99] Of course, the text that Planché and the Kembles worked with was not fully Shakespeare's, but rather the Colley Cibber adaptation that dominated stages until the late nineteenth century. But through Planché's book, *Richard III* provides another example of the intersection between interest in historical reproduction and actress-driven focus on extreme emotion. For although the book did not feature a specific cast, Sarah Siddons and other stars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all counted Queen Elizabeth among the roles in their repertoire. Rackin and Howard write that '[i]n *King John,* Shakespeare goes as far as he will ever go in making women, women's skeptical voices, and women's truth central to the history he staged, leaving his sources behind and venturing into the realm of the unwritten and conjectural'.[100] More recent criticism sees equal investment in women's history, if not more, in *Richard III,* where Shakespeare likewise abandons the chronicles to create a series of scenes of female

[98] Michael Billington, '*King John* – review', *Guardian,* 20 April 2012 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/apr/20/king-john-review>; directed by Maria Aberg for the Royal Shakespeare Company.
[99] Lockhart, p. 37.
[100] Rackin and Howard, p. 133.

interaction and lament that have no original in his known sources. Tassi and Alison Thorne link the women of *Richard III* to Katherine and Constance as characters defined by what Tassi describes as virtuous anger, and by what Thorne calls conscientious complaint.[101] Queen Elizabeth, favoured by the stars of the eighteenth century, and Margaret, excised entirely by the Colley Cibber adaptation but often the focal point today, especially when *Richard III* is performed in a cycle production, are the most prominent of the play's four major female roles. Lady Anne's attempted defiance, though popular with actors, is undermined by her ultimate capitulation to Richard, and the Duchess of York's scenes—and often the character herself—are frequently cut.

Critics increasingly read the conflict between Richard and the female mourners of the men he has killed as fundamental to the play's themes: '*Richard III* encompasses a struggle between Richard's will to forget the dead, to effect political amnesia by a perpetual orientation toward the future, and the mourning women who embody the past, the insistence and intrusion of memory upon human action'.[102] Constance and Katherine's laments win audience sympathy, but gain them nothing from the other characters onstage. Constance in particular is unceremoniously shunted from the narrative by her abrupt offstage death. Queen Elizabeth and her companions in grief actually achieve the aims of their laments—bringing Richard down and elevating his Tudor rival—for 'the appearance of the ghosts and Richard's troubled dreams', the harbingers of Richard's downfall, 'are poetically and dramatically linked to the ritual laments of the widowed queens'.[103] As Paige Martin Reynolds writes, female mourning in this play is not just retrospective—rather, 'memory through female

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[101] Tassi, p. 22; Alison Thorne, ''O, lawful let it be/That I have room… to curse awhile': Voicing the Nation's Conscience in Female Complaint in *Richard III, King John,* and *Henry VIII*' in *This England, That Shakespeare,* ed. by Willy Mally and Margaret Tudeau Clayton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 105-126, p. 108.
[102] Goodland, p. 141.
[103] Goodland, p. 140. See also: Tobias Döring, *Performances of Mourning in Shakespearean Theatre and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Isabel Karreman, 'Rites of Oblivion in Shakespearian History Plays', *Shakespeare Survey*, 2010, 24–36; Paige Martin Reynolds, 'Mourning and Memory in *Richard III*,' *American Notes and Queries* 21.2 (2008), 19-25; Lina Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

mourning determines the future'.[104] Shakespeare repeatedly disrupts the linear progression of Richard's ascent to return to Elizabeth, and it is through her and the other women that the audience receives confirmation of some of the play's most dramatic turns: King Edward's death (2.2), Richard imprisoning the young princes (2.4), Richard's crowning (4.1), and the publicising of the death of the princes (4.4). Because Shakespeare so obviously departs from his chronicle sources in these scenes, recent critics have been more inclined to see them as essential to his historical dramaturgy, recognising that such original departures must be intentionally and artistically motivated.[105] In an ironic contrast to the reception of the romantic histories, their lack of precedent in Shakespeare's source material is what helps critics recognise their importance.

Even so, these scenes and characters have a chequered history in performance and adaptation, and today the female characters' structural importance is likely to be disrupted by heavy cuts. At the same time, however, the characters continue to attract what sometimes amounts to little more than celebrity cameos, highlighting both the enduring power of these roles, and the enduring ability of celebrity to draw attention to them. The two most recent screen adaptations of *Richard III* demonstrate this phenomenon: in Richard Loncraine's 1995 film, Queen Elizabeth is played by American actor Annette Bening and the Duchess of York by Maggie Smith (Margaret is cut, though some of her prophetic lines are reassigned to Smith's Duchess). In 2015's BBC miniseries *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses,* which presents an abridged version of the full tetralogy, the Duchess is played by Judi Dench, and Elizabeth by television star Keeley Hawes. Margaret is played in all three parts of the series by Sophie Okonedo, though in *Richard III*, the film's energy is drawn firmly away from her story arc and towards Richard's. In both versions, the roles of the women are

[104] Reynolds, p. 19.
[105] Thorne, p. 108ff.

relatively small, but the heft of celebrity provided by these recognisable actresses refocuses attention in adaptations that are otherwise wholly preoccupied with Richard (in both instances, also a showcase celebrity role). This casting pattern reflects an understanding, conscious or otherwise, that these roles are important, and require a degree of audience attention and sympathy that the adapted texts do not otherwise leave space for. Thus, in *Richard III*, the history women tell—and history that places the contributions of angry, mournful, unruly women at its centre—at last becomes 'real' history, both in the eyes of critics and artists, and within the confines of the play text itself, where these characters' interventions reshape the story.

Rather than conceiving of Shakespeare's female characters as disfiguring history, straining at its edges until it loses the shape of accuracy, in this chapter I have tried to articulate an understanding of historical dramaturgy that includes and even centralises them. Contextualising the plays lends support to this more inclusive vision, be it the context of other writers' work, as with the romantic historical tradition in which Shakespeare only briefly participated; the context of early modern English performance, literary, and political culture, all of which contribute essential strands of understanding to characters who otherwise seem inescapably foreign; and even the context of periods beyond Shakespeare's own during which now-neglected plays found particular success. The broader historical culture of early modern England likewise reminds us that there are forms such as ballads and genres such as comedies that were as much a part of shaping an Elizabethan and Jacobean understanding of history and the individuals within it as Shakespeare's histories. Shakespeare's plays cannot be taken as the final word on the shape of early modern historical narratives overall. Structures that insist upon women as exceptional or marginal, fundamentally separate from or in opposition to the broader historical aims of the plays, are constructed, not inevitable. In the

case of Shakespeare, we have been too willing to let assumptions about this apparently inevitable place of women in historical narratives—assumptions derived, in part, from popular neglect of the plays that disprove them—obscure what his female characters actually *do* in the plays, onstage and on the page.

What they do is far from uniform: the foreign female characters such as Margaret and Joan, who have been seen to define England through opposition, in fact emblematise the complexity of national identity and the diversity of internal and external threats facing England. In contrast, disruptive roles like Constance and Elizabeth bring the weight of tragic emotion to bear on their cause, rallying onstage and offstage audiences in defiance of a corrupted nation. But unlike Ida, Dorothea, and the Countess of Salisbury, who also oppose corrupt kings, these lamenting women assert a tragic conception of history. The women of the historical comedies instead become the mechanism by which the king—and thus the country—is redeemed. These varied intersections of character, country, and context demonstrate that our understanding of what Shakespeare is doing with history in these plays cannot be separated from an understanding of what he is doing with his female characters. Thus, through examining them, we can begin to discover not simply what women do in Shakespeare's vision of history, but to address the question posed at the beginning of this chapter of what a Shakespearean history play actually is.

CHAPTER TWO | From the Margins: Reading Female Characters Into History

The female roles highlighted in Chapter 1 reflect the ways female characters can help define an English history play's relationship to foreignness, the place of disruptive emotion within its plot structure, and how historical accuracy is deployed to either clear space for or obstruct female presence. The anonymous Elizabethan play *Thomas of Woodstock,* which has survived only as an incomplete manuscript, features a character who combines all of these features—but unlike the female characters of the previous chapter, is unable to make much use of them. This chapter will consider such apparently ineffective female presences, arguing for the importance even of women who seem to hew to the stereotype that history plays only include silent, side-lined wives—a type that *Thomas of Woodstock*'s Queen Anne seems to epitomise. In a scene reminiscent of *The Scottish History of James IV*'s opening sequence, King Richard II enters early in the play to present his new bride, Anne of Bohemia—or, as the play calls her, Anne o' Beame—to the court. Unlike the ominous entrance of Margaret of Anjou, Anne is welcomed joyfully by the courtiers, and with her first speech, expresses her hopes to be 'English made, let me be Englishèd. / They best shall please me, shall me English call' (1.3.48). Any fear of a malign foreign presence is thus immediately neutralised, as Anne herself rejects any identification but as an Englishwoman. Alzada J. Tipton describes Anne as one of the 'moral arbiters' of the play, along with the titular Woodstock. The characters are united in their attempts to reign in Richard's abuses of his royal power.[1] Tipton goes on to trace the precedents for Woodstock's resistance to royal authority in political thought and literature of the time, while Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost place Anne in a

[1] Alzada J. Tipton, '"The meanest man shall be permitted freely to accuse": The Commoners in the Anonymous Play *Woodstock*,' *Comparative Drama*, 32 (1998), 117–45, p. 127.

similar context of historical mediator queens.[2] I suggest that Anne instead has a theatrical lineage: echoes of and precedents for her behaviour are to be found not only in political tracts, but in similar character types in other plays.

Despite her foreign origins, Anne becomes an emblem of the conscience of England that King Richard's indolence and corruption have caused him to neglect. Though not a commoner, she aligns herself with their interests: 'I do not sorrow in mine own behalf / […] 'Tis England's subjects' sorrows I sustain' (2.31-36). This unity with the people of England—Anne does not just feel *for* their sorrows, but claims to *actually* feel them—becomes unity with England itself. In a mirror of the romantic histories' conflation of violation of a female subject and violation of the kingdom, Richard's wrongs towards his subjects and his loyal uncle Woodstock are physically manifested in Anne. The first scene of Act 4 ends with King Richard having 'parted [his] whole realm among' his favourites, county by county (4.1.260), after which they set off to 'Surprise plain Woodstock' (4.1.266), exiting with an ominous couplet: 'Beware, Plain Thomas, for King Richard comes / Resolved with blood to wash all former wrongs' (4.1.273-4). 'Plain Thomas' himself enters and speaks next, following one ominous statement up with another: 'The Queen so sick!' (4.2.1). This direct juxtaposition creates a symbolic cause and effect, reinforcing the physical connection between the Queen and England itself. Where previously she felt the realm's sorrows herself, now she embodies its corruption. We hear no word of the Queen's illness before this point, and Woodstock's surprise emphasises its suddenness, which in turn strengthens the link between Richard's actions and Anne's disease.

Woodstock more explicitly highlights this unity later in the scene as he contemplates a brewing storm, yet another traditional means of demonstrating the link between King and

[2] Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost, ''Nothing Hath Begot My Something Grief': Invisible Queenship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare's Queens*, ed. by Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 227-249, p. 228.

country: 'I fear [Anne's] death / Will be the tragic scene the sky foreshows us. / When kingdoms change, the very heavens are troubled. / Pray God, King Richard's wild behaviour / Force not the powers of heaven to frown upon us' (4.2.69-73). Though Anne most frequently appears onstage in scenarios that would likely be described as 'domestic' or 'private'—sewing, talking with her ladies-in-waiting—Woodstock recognises that Anne's death would bring about reverberating change. Her sole direct interventions in affairs of state are the provision of goods for the poor and gentle warnings to Richard that are easily brushed off, but Woodstock can foresee the political consequences of her death. After Anne dies, things do indeed change: Richard is overcome with sorrow and remorse. He tries to revoke his order to have Woodstock murdered, but his efforts come too late (4.3.172ff). Unlike the women of the romantic histories or the mourning women of Shakespeare, no one listens to Anne's legitimate warnings and fears for the state of the kingdom and her husband's unsteady reign until there is nothing left to be done. Instead, she is silenced and set aside, first by the other characters and ultimately by death.

Such silencing is the subject of this chapter, which turns to characters who, like Anne, attempt to intervene in the political plots of their plays, but fail or are ignored. These abortive engagements have been widely neglected, dismissed as docility or passivity when they may be more usefully read as efforts to act that are unsuccessful. In some cases, these female characters are pushed out of the realm of politics and into that of the 'domestic', marginalised by critics with an insistence that their irrelevance to the plays' political work renders them inherently secondary. However, as Anne of Bohemia demonstrates, failed participation is not lack of participation, and characters who operate in settings parallel to and apparently separate from the main political plot can still be agents of profound literal and symbolic change.

Where the female characters highlighted in the previous chapter aggressively asserted their place in their plays and in history, the female characters of this chapter are more muted presences. They seem to support the stereotypical image of female characters in history plays, and to reinforce the prevalent assumption that the only place for women in Shakespeare's histories is to be quiet, obedient, and passive. But despite a common critical assumption that these traits manifest as untroubled submission to the events taking place around them, this chapter will argue that this reading misunderstands the nature of the characters' participation. They attempt to prevent battles, redefine allegiances, and forestall marriages—but without success. Such interventions recur with surprising consistency across almost all of Shakespeare's history plays, to the extent that they should be considered an essential element of his historical dramaturgy. Through their curtailed interventions, these female characters open a gap between the facts of the chronicles on which the plays are based and the events of the drama itself, existing within what Graham Holderness describes as 'the absent, shadowy or marginal spaces' of history. However, as Holderness writes, 'the plays repeatedly demonstrate that absence […] both shapes the drama, and points to deeper levels of meaning within or beyond it'.[3] Within this shadowy space, the characters of this chapter blur the boundaries between history and fiction, allowing audiences to undertake their own individual, imaginative engagement with these figures at the margins of the plays. Such blending of categories creates a more decentralised vision of the history play's purpose, suggesting a genre that, in Shakespeare's hands, is more engaged with troubling received images of history and nation than reifying them.

[3] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare, The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 15.

Unheeded warnings

King John's Blanche of Castile, the smallest and least-discussed of the play's three female roles, exemplifies both the dramaturgical tendencies described above and the most common critical responses to them. Blanche is thrust to prominence through a sudden marriage with the Dauphin, Lewis, in order to end the conflict between his France and her uncle John's England. A. J. Piesse writes that Blanche is 'the pawn, the acquiescent victim to the Dauphin's too-perfect political rhetoric'.[4] Jacqueline Vanhoutte sees hers as 'a dynastic marriage that comes to symbolise [John's] mistreatment of the nation […] The metaphorical dismemberment of Blanche foreshadows Lewis's invasion of England',[5] a reading that places Blanche in a parallel position to Anne of Bohemia: the foreign (in her case, Spanish) emblem of the wrongs done to England by its own king. Vanhoutte's reference to 'dismemberment' alludes to Blanche's own speech describing her impossible position when a declaration of war follows immediately on the heels of her marriage: 'Which is the side that I must go withal? / I am with both; each army hath a hand, / And in their rage, I having hold of both, / They whirl asunder and dismember me' (3.1.327-30). But this is far from Blanche's only speech on the matter. In fact, though she ultimately assents to both the marriage and to take her husband's side in the war, she does so in terms that are difficult to describe as 'acquiescent'. Falling short of open defiance, Blanche is an example of the recurring mode in which Shakespeare's more minor female characters interact with history. She makes an attempt to reject or forestall coming events that cannot be sustained in the face of patriarchal opposition, and so she gives way to reluctant acceptance. In Blanche's case, her overlooked attempt to prevent war links her to Constance as both victim and warning of the unintended consequences of male politicking—consequences habitually left out of the cause-and-effect

[4] Piesse, p. 134.
[5] Vanhoutte, p. 142-3.

narrations of the traditional chronicles, but that are briefly but meaningfully highlighted by Shakespeare.

The war Blanche hopes to prevent is sparked by the arrival of Cardinal Pandulph, who excommunicates King John and urges the King of France to take up arms against him despite the fact that Blanche and the Dauphin have been married that very day. The Cardinal's entrance launches a series of appeals and negotiations: John to the King of France to ignore the Cardinal; Lewis to his father to listen and obey; Constance to King and Cardinal to go to war; and, far less frequently discussed, Blanche to Lewis to maintain the peace. She interjects into the debates twice, once in response to her new husband, and once in response to Constance:

> DAUPHIN: Bethink you, father, for the difference
> Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome,
> Or the light loss of England for a friend.
> Forego the easier.
>
> BLANCHE: That's the curse of Rome.
>
> CONSTANCE: O Lewis, stand fast; the devil tempts thee here
> In likeness of a new untrimmèd bride.
>
> BLANCHE: The Lady Constance speaks not from her faith,
> But from her need.
>
> CONSTANCE: O, if thou grant my need,
> Which only lives by the death of faith,
> That need must needs infer this principle:
> That faith would live again by death of need. (3.1.203-14)

Constance's retort silences Blanche, though it also draws attention to the fact that Lewis gives no verbal acknowledgement of his new wife's speech. Constance's first line, however, might imply a silent response from Lewis, an appearance of inclining towards Blanche, prompting Constance's exhortation to 'stand fast'. Blanche's second line, in which she addresses Constance in the third person, could therefore be directed to either her husband, urging him not to turn away from her, or to Constance herself, as the only person onstage

who has acknowledged Blanche's speech. Linked together verbally and visually as parallel petitioners, Blanche attempts to set herself in contrast to Constance, accusing her of drawing not on disinterested religious faith, but on personal need, while Blanche instead argues in the political terms her husband proposes, weighing the relative diplomatic and religious weight of a break with England or with Rome. It is only when this tactic fails that Blanche attempts to remind her husband of the personal, individual cost of breaking the alliance that Blanche herself is meant to symbolise.

The gap the text leaves here in terms of Lewis's response to these entreaties recalls Philip C. McGuire's concept of the 'open silence', a silence or lack of response 'whose precise meanings and effects, because they cannot be determined by analysis of the words of the playtext, must be established by nonverbal, extratexual features of the play that emerge only in performance'.[6] These silences are reminders, McGuire writes, of the fundamentally collaborative nature of Shakespeare's works, of 'the presence within Shakespeare's designs or strategies of moments that give full scope to the creative energies and talents of those who make performances of his plays possible'.[7] Here and in other history plays, Shakespeare intentionally deploys such silences in order to engage the 'creative energies' not only of his performers, but of his audiences, leaving gaps that must be interpreted and filled by the reader or spectator. It is notable that Blanche is generally figured in criticism as the silent partner, but in fact, she states her views clearly throughout the scene. It is not Blanche who is the 'blank page', as critics have described her,[8] but rather it is Lewis whose failure to respond creates an open silence to be filled. Does he acknowledge Blanche, thus emphasising her role as a participant in the scene's debate? Or is she a fully marginalised figure whose interjections are ignored by everyone but Constance?

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[6] Philip C. McGuire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. xv.
[7] McGuire, p. xx.
[8] Howard and Rackin, p. 122.

Whether or not she is listened to, Blanche's words make her position clear. When Lewis calls for the French to take up arms, Blanche deploys precisely the rhetorical strategy—temptation '[i]n likeness of a new untrimmèd bride'—that Constance previously accused her of abusing:

> What, shall our feast be kept with slaughtered men?
> […] O husband, hear me! Ay, alack, how new
> Is 'husband' in my mouth! Even for that name
> Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce
> Upon my knee I beg: go not to arms
> Against mine uncle' (3.1.302-309)

Only after this plea is roundly ignored does she begin imagining her own helpless dismemberment by the warring armies. At the end of this second speech, Lewis finally directly addresses Blanche, though he is curiously unresponsive to the bulk of what she has said, instead answering only her presumably rhetorical question about who she should side with: 'Lady, with me, with me thy fortune lies'. Blanche responds, 'There where my fortune lives, there my life dies' (3.1.337-8). This couplet—Blanche and Lewis's last lines, though not the last lines of the scene—is indeed acquiescence, but in such negative and despairing terms that it undermines itself by drawing attention to the limits of Blanche's ability to meaningfully resist. The terms of her surrender are made abundantly clear: like Constance, she agrees not from her faith, but from her need.

In Shakespeare's Globe's 2015 co-production with the Theatre Royal and Derngate, director James Dacre cleared the stage for this exchange, leaving Blanche and Lewis alone as she made her appeal to him. The men having already run off to pursue battle, Blanche's plea became particularly helpless, an attempt to alter a foregone conclusion. Lewis listened with visible impatience, eager to join the other men, and at Blanche's grim conclusion to their shared couplet, he dropped her hand in frustration and stormed offstage. Alone, Blanche broke into plaintive song—the first instance of solo singing in a show studded with musical interludes—that transformed seamlessly into battle music. In a partial fulfilment of her vision

of warring armies who 'whirl asunder and dismember me', the stage flooded with soldiers who swirled around the static Blanche, until at last she wandered offstage, alone. In this staging, Blanche was rendered even more powerless than in the text, begging to avoid a situation that was already underway. It marginalised her from the heart of the debate, rendering her public declaration instead a private plea and reducing her visual similarity to the disruptive Constance.

But in contrast to the potential disempowerment of isolation from the rest of the scene, her stillness and moment of solo song granted her full possession of the stage for several moments, demanding attention to and consideration of the difficulty of her position, her immoveable presence in the midst of battle suggesting an enduring personal resistance—even if, ultimately, she was forced to leave the stage. The text supports this interpretation. Though critics and the onstage onlookers read Blanche's ability to be silenced as surrender, Shakespeare takes pains to emphasise that she has done everything within her power to change the outcome of the scene. Despite mirroring Constance's language and gestures—both end up kneeling to Lewis—she simply lacks Constance's ability to command attention.

Like Constance, Blanche also represents the unintended consequences of political decisions made by those in power over those who have none. Blanche's position does not seem to be on anyone's mind during the negotiation, but her 'metaphorical dismemberment' happens anyway, and she is left alone—literally, for Dacre—to deal with the private aftermath. Janette Dillon suggests that female characters often serve this role, 'to allow, even compel, the audience to consider the implications of the decisions and actions taken in more plot-driven scenes'.[9] But Blanche, who only ever appears in such 'plot-driven scenes', is not just an emissary from another, less plot-centred dramatic world. The King of France's betrayal of Constance, and John and Lewis's betrayal of Blanche, both have unintended

[9] Dillon, p. 69.

consequences far beyond the women's personal hurt and confusion: Prince Arthur's capture and death, and Lewis's invasion of England in Blanche's name both stem directly from this moment. Ignoring the warnings of female characters proves to be, in short, a dangerous mistake. The moment is not just Shakespeare's uncritical replication of patriarchal governing structures, but a hint at these kings' failures as leaders. Conflating lack of success with lack of effort erases an important form of intervention for both Blanche and Constance, ironically re-enacting in criticism the marginalisation and erasure that they undergo onstage—and thus, like the leaders who ignore them, overlooking the potential political import of their warnings.

Lady Percy plays a similar role in *1 Henry IV,* highlighting the weakness of her male relations' political cause. She attempts to appeal to her husband Hotspur's good sense and, like Blanche, prevent him from going to war. Both Dillon and David M. Bergeron highlight Lady Percy's effectiveness in *2 Henry IV*, where she successfully persuades her father-in-law not to join an upcoming battle.[10] But they are less attentive to her matching intervention in *Part 1*, a scene that Dillon largely brushes aside as a picture of 'the small details and activities of domestic life' and Bergeron does not mention at all.[11] As with Blanche, Lady Percy's intervention in *1 Henry IV* seems to be ignored because she fails. Unlike in the scene between Brutus and Portia in *Julius Caesar* that so distinctly mirrors Hotspur and Lady Percy's, Hotspur does not ultimately trust his wife to know his business.[12] Though she never demands it as directly as Portia, Lady Percy unquestionably seeks political information, and a disruption to her husband's political plans: 'I fear my brother Mortimer doth stir / About his title and hath sent for you / To line his enterprise; but if you go—' (2.3.78-80). But Hotspur

[10] Dillon, p. 73; David M. Bergeron, 'Shakespeare Makes History: *2 Henry IV,' Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 31 (1991), 231-245, p. 235.
[11] Dillon, p. 75.
[12] Laurie E. Maguire, ''Household Kates': Chez Petruchio, Percy, and Plantagenet' in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance,* ed by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 129-165, p. 143. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of these parallel scenes.

will not let her finish the question, much less provide an answer to it. Whether Hotspur's teasing of his wife is read as affectionate or cruel, his ducking the question hints at the shakiness of the rebels' party, a fundamental state of uncertainty and mistrust that even extends to a woman who is wife to one conspirator and sister to another. Hotspur's evasive answers are reminders of the blend of personal and political weaknesses that will lead to his downfall: his hot temper and his ill-advised cause. Within this very scene, we see him give too much information to an unsteady ally—as revealed in the letter he begins the scene reading—and too little to someone he ought to trust.

In his 2010 production for Shakespeare's Globe, director Dominic Dromgoole expressed the same visual impulse as Dacre's described above, and left Lady Percy momentarily alone onstage after her husband's exit, her silent, lingering reaction accompanied by transitional music. The scene ends with Hotspur asking Lady Percy if his plan for her to follow him without being told where or why contents her, and she replies that 'It must, of force' (2.3.113). This resentful surrender, given particular weight as the last line of the scene, could serve as a theme for all of the female characters discussed in this chapter: they are 'content' to agree because they have no other choice.

The device of using female characters as a tactical and moral barometer for men appears more starkly in *Edmund Ironside*, an anonymous Elizabethan play that has occasionally been attributed to Shakespeare, but never with lasting or widespread acceptance. *Edmund Ironside* exists only in manuscript, and tells the story of the future King Edmund II's fight for the throne of England against the Danish Canutus (now commonly known as King Cnut). In the fifth act of the play, Edmund and Canutus prepare to face each other in single combat. Each is accompanied by a woman: Canutus by his English wife Egina, and Edmund by his stepmother Emma, the widow of Ethelred, the previous king. In parallel exchanges, each tries to persuade the man she follows not to engage in combat. Canutus's retorts to

Egina are derisive and cruelly comic: 'Will you fight for me? / Give her my sword and shield […] I had rather fight with him than scold with you' (5.2.181, 207). Edmund, in contrast, is far more respectful of Emma's pleas, though also ultimately dismissive: '[M]adam be content and you shall see / The God in whom I trust will succour me' (5.2.200-1). Coming immediately before they engage in ritualised combat, their treatment of their female followers becomes the combatants' final ethical test. Though both reject the women's counsel to avoid the fight, the terms in which this rejection takes place are framed as morally important: Canutus mocks and ignores Egina, where Edmund listens to and acknowledges Emma's argument. Unlike Blanche and Lady Percy, Emma and Egina's protestations are presented in terms that emphasise their importance despite their ineffectiveness.

Edmund Ironside's moral clarity provides a useful model for considering the subtler roles of Shakespeare's women. But while Shakespeare does not underline their importance to the same extent, he gives his female characters much more time to make their case: Lady Percy has an entire scene to stage her attempted intervention, even if critics fail to recognise it as such. Blanche, too, has more stage time and text dedicated to her resistance than the lack of critical engagement with her role would suggest. In contrast to Emma and Egina's single speeches, Shakespeare leaves much longer threads of unresolved resistance, enhancing the importance of these female characters' exclusions by drawing out their failure to intervene over the course of entire scenes. Shakespeare could brush them aside in a line or two, as the author of *Edmund Ironside* does, but he chooses instead to increase the size and difficulty of these female roles by shining a light on them and their own form of resistance—a resistance that draws attention to untold histories and unfulfilled potential, the detritus of the play's overtly political actions that, as with the image of Blanche and Lady Percy alone onstage, the plays lack the words to express.

Political marriages

Though frequently dismissed as silent, Blanche has two major speaking appearances in *King John*, and arguably attempts to intervene politically in both. Her second scene, as the section above argues, is unmistakably political in its dealings with war and alliances. Understanding her first scene as a political action, however, requires recognising that in a history play, marriages are always political. Even the marriages that seem to be borne of love or passion—like the marriage of the Mortimers in *1 Henry IV*, or King Edward IV's lust for Elizabeth Grey and King Henry VIII's for Anne Bullen—are depicted as political decisions, with important consequences for the state. Equally politically charged, therefore, is the opposite scenario: marriages the participants attempt to refuse.

Forced or reluctant engagements recur repeatedly in Shakespeare's history plays and frequently, the actual moment of consent to marriage by a female character is left undepicted. Once again, *Edmund Ironside* hints at the dramatic conventions potentially at work in these scenes. In the second act of the play, Egina is suddenly faced with a proposal of marriage from King Canutus. Egina obediently replies, 'What my dread Sov'reign, and my father wills, / I dare not, nay I will not, contradict' (2.1.49-52). Canutus suggests that they go 'straight to church', to which the bishop who is present agrees, 'if every part be pleased'. Canutus says he is, but the Bishop looks to Egina for confirmation.

> BISHOP: But what say you?
> EGINA: I say a woman's silence is consent (2.2.64-5).

The above exchange raises the possibility that an early modern audience would have read Shakespeare's unresolved proposal scenes through a perspective like Egina's: female characters' consent does not need to be literally depicted because their silence is widely understood as an acceptable substitute in theatrical terms. But when Shakespeare's political marriages are compared to those in other history plays, it becomes obvious that his female characters' habitual silence in the face of marriage is not the norm. Silence does not indicate

consent for other writers, as the romantic histories discussed above suggest; Egina's comment is surely ironic. In contrast, Shakespeare's deliberate, consistent elision of consent suggests that in the political realm of the history play, a woman's frank consent may be beside the point, if not wholly impossible. The inability to refuse marriage becomes a key site of failed intervention, highlighting the potential of these female characters as political actors, and also underscoring the cracks in the patriarchal historiography that silences them—cracks through which the distance between the artificial structures of a history play and the unknowable events of history itself can be seen.

Presented suddenly with the imperative to marry Lewis to secure an alliance with France, *King John*'s Blanche is evasive and equivocal in the face of the Dauphin's recitations of the expected assertions of instant love:

> BLANCHE: My uncle's will in this respect is mine.
> If that he see aught in you that makes him like,
> That anything he sees which moves his liking,
> I can with ease translate it to my will.
> Or if you will, to speak more properly,
> I will enforce it eas'ly to my love.
> Further I will not flatter you, my lord,
> That all I see in you is worthy love
> Than this, that nothing I do see in you,
> Though churlish thoughts themselves should be your judge,
> That I can find should merit any hate (2.1.511-21).

Her convoluted language refuses to settle into any conventional mode: though she initially speaks of needing to 'will' herself to consent, she amends 'to speak more properly' and instead calls it 'love'—but brings in the word 'enforce' to describe what she must do to arrive at this love. While it is possible to read her jumbled thoughts on Lewis's likeability—or perhaps just lack of hateability—as coy or sarcastic flirtation, the other characters' responses suggest they are also confused about what she is trying to say. John presses her to answer more clearly—'What say you, my niece?'—and Blanche replies 'That she is bound in duty still to do / What you in wisdom still vouchsafe to say'. This cool response, reminiscent of

Egina's to Canutus quoted above, contrasts distinctly with the Dauphin's reply when asked in turn if he can love Blanche: 'Nay, ask me if I can refrain from love' (2.1.522-6).

Blanche's lack of enthusiasm becomes starker when compared to her resistance to war after the marriage, forming a coherent narrative of reluctant acquiescence to events over which she is incapable of exerting any control. In the end, Blanche never actually says 'yes' to marriage to the Dauphin. Shakespeare's repeated construction of similar scenes might be read as a kind of open silence, like those discussed above: it is unclear how the female characters are meant to react, if they do at all, to the fact that these marriages move ahead without their explicit consent, and sometimes in spite of their explicit resistance. In describing open silences, McGuire reminds us that their meaning is fundamentally irretrievable: 'we cannot deduce what their actions were by studying those words of Shakespeare that have come down to us. Whatever Shakespeare's intentions (if any), history has ensured that the silences […] are "open" for us'.[13] But these open silences accrue implied meaning by looking more closely at their repetitions across the genre, by reading them not as isolated moments, but as what Janette Dillon calls 'scenic units': '[r]epetitions and variations of particular stage images […] crucial to Shakespeare's early history plays' that can reveal 'important patterns within a single play as well as its links with other plays in the same series'.[14] By 'the same series', Dillon generally means within the two tetralogies, but as I will demonstrate, these patterns of elided consent can be found across Shakespeare's history plays. Such repetition suggests that these scenic units are not a sexist coincidence, but should instead be considered a feature of the genre under Shakespeare. They suggest a historical dramaturgy founded on the tension between history and drama, and more at odds with its source material than criticism has traditionally allowed. The repetition of this scenic unit

[13] McGuire, p. 122.
[14] Dillon, p. 5.

embeds throughout the history plays female characters who are caught in the friction between history and fiction, generating a sense of the history play as a genre that does not simply seek to adapt the traditional modes of historical narrative, but operates in contention with them.

The scenic unit in question here is a scene in which a woman in a history play is offered marriage, and though she never openly consents, the play proceeds as if she has. A particularly clear example is that of Lady Grey, the future Queen Elizabeth, in *3 Henry VI.* When she comes before the newly crowned King Edward IV to plead for restitution of her dead husband's seized lands, Edward's brothers Clarence and Gloucester believe they understand exactly what kind of scene they are about to observe: 'I see the lady hath a thing to grant / Before the King will grant her humble suit' (3.2.12-3). But Lady Grey repeatedly defies the attempts of Edward and his brothers to 'fit her into a known narrative—that of the lusty widow able and willing to become the mistress of a notoriously lusty king'.[15] Gloucester and Clarence's conversation in asides make it impossible for Elizabeth to fully control the narrative the brothers are constructing for the audience, but she resists Edward's direct insinuations at every turn. She finally forces him to speak his intentions outright ('To tell thee plain, I aim to lie with thee' [3.2.69]) at which point she flatly rejects them: 'To tell thee plain, I had rather lie in prison' (3.2.70). The exchange ends awkwardly; her last line is to insist that ''Twill grieve your grace my sons should call you father', an objection Edward brushes aside with a speech that concludes with the command, 'Answer no more, for thou shalt be my queen' (3.2.106). When next we see her, she is his queen indeed (4.1.9). The moment in which she actually agrees to this goes undepicted and undescribed. There are many ways to imagine filling the open silence of her non-consent, for she remains onstage,

[15] Kavita Mudan Finn, *The Last Plantagenet Consorts: Gender, Genre, and Historiography, 1440-1627* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 161.

not speaking, for almost twenty lines after Edward makes his declaration and before he directs her to leave with him.

In Shakespeare's Globe's 2019 production of the play, the brothers' subsequent debate over the now-concluded marriage served as a potent reminder of the power of the silent female presence onstage. Only speaking once in the scene but present throughout, Elizabeth's place as subject of conversation, spoken about and spoken over without the ability to reply, underlined a sense of continuity from her so-called wooing scene, an embedded visual reminder that in her last scene, and as far as we have heard since, Lady Gray wanted this marriage as little as Edward's brothers do. In production, her status as the only woman onstage made her an eye-catching presence. Both Edward and Gloucester were likewise played by women, reflective of the flexible approach to gender in casting throughout the production, but this in fact emphasised the ways in which Elizabeth was differentiated by her costume and physicality. The production's design aesthetic placed contemporary fashions in a heightened, exaggerated register, including the entire company stripping down to shorts and numbered football tops, colour-coded in red and white and labelled with their names, to prepare for battle. After their victory, the three York brothers remained in these outfits, soiled by fighting in onstage dirt, until the final scene of the play. So, despite being one of three female actors onstage, Elizabeth was rendered unavoidably conspicuous as the sole female character by her well-tailored, spotless feminine clothing in contrast to the brothers' grimy sports kit. The starkness of her visual difference highlighted that it was not the playwright who was ignoring her presence, but the characters, a tension within the scene that does not show as clearly on the page. In this scene, Elizabeth is briefly able to speak for herself, articulating her distress at Gloucester and Clarence's snubs before her husband hushes her; in the scene of her betrothal, our only hint at her feelings is Gloucester's description of her face after the deed is done: 'The widow likes it not, for she looks very sad' (3.2.110).

As Finn notes, watching his brother in *3 Henry VI,* Gloucester thinks he can guess what is about to happen: the conventional courtship of a willing woman by a lascivious king.[16] His certainty raises once again the possibility that Egina's assessment of the pointlessness of verbal consent is accurate: explicit consent can be replaced with theatrical convention, and thus Lady Grey does not need to openly say *yes* because the audience, like Gloucester, recognises from the generic and poetic framework that she certainly will. But there is a different theatrical precedent to draw upon when considering questions of consent: the romantic histories discussed in Chapter 1. In these plays, when a king attempts and fails to seduce an uninterested or unavailable woman, often a commoner, efforts like King Edward's are roundly and explicitly denied. This generic pattern reinforces the fact that absence of female marital consent in most of Shakespeare's history plays is deliberate.

In his own foray into the genre of romantic history, *Edward III,* Shakespeare demonstrates that he is quite capable of turning a woman's polite resistance into explicit rejection. The Countess of Salisbury is initially playful but unequivocal that sleeping with King Edward is not on the table: 'But that your lips were sacred, my lord, / You would profane the holy name of love. / That love you offer me you cannot give, / For Caesar owes that tribute to his queen; / The love you beg of me I cannot give, / For Sara owes that duty to her lord' (2.415-20). The Countess and Lady Grey draw upon the same rhetorical tricks to walk the fine line of obedience and dissent that their situation demands, the two Edwards extracting a promise from each to give what he asks for, and each responding that she will, 'except I cannot do it' (*3H6* 3.2.47) or 'As near, my liege, as all my woman's power / Can pawn itself to buy thy remedy' (*E3* 2.370-1). Each then attempts to equivocate her way out of acceptance: told that her task is 'but to love a king', Lady Grey replies, 'That's soon performed because I am a subject'. Edward protests, 'But stay thee, 'tis the fruits of love I

[16] Mudan Finn, p. 16.

mean,' and Lady Grey again agrees, 'The fruits of love I mean, my loving liege […] My love till death, my humble thanks, my prayers, / That love which virtue begs and virtue grants' (*3H6* 3.2.53-63). The Countess deploys the same strategy, promising 'That power of love that I have power to give / Thou hast, with all devout obedience' (*E3* 2.383-5).

The striking similarities between the two exchanges drive home Dillon's concept of the scenic unit, and furthermore suggest the kind of cross-play repetitions that allowed early modern companies to perform so many new plays in such a short period of time almost entirely without rehearsal. But the two scenes' structural and linguistic parallels make their ultimate divergence all the more noticeable, especially given that Shakespeare is now generally agreed to have written both exchanges.[17] Drawing upon the same tropes to set up a justified rejection in one instance and an unspoken acceptance in another complicates any assumption that Shakespeare is relying on theatrical convention to telegraph Elizabeth's forthcoming agreement. Indeed, the historical comedy genre that Lady Grey's careful evasions directly recall is one that firmly insists that even a king must obtain explicit romantic consent. Edward IV, judged by Shakespeare's own structural standards, does not.

In considering how to fill the silence that follows the Duke's proposal to Isabella in *Measure for Measure,* Pascale Aebischer proposes that it might be intentionally left open to be filled by the confusion of the boy actor playing Isabella: it seems obvious that the Duke is prompting the boy to speak, but he has no scripted lines to say. Shakespeare therefore could have been deliberately playing on the conditions of performance to create his desired effect of confusion and tension.[18] The same might be true in the case of Lady Grey and Edward, with the boy playing Elizabeth awkwardly uncertain as to how to respond to a command that

[17] Proudfoot and Bennett, p. 69; Santiago Segarra, Mark Eisen, Gabriel Egan, and Alejandro Ribeiro, 'Attributing the Authorship of the Henry VI Plays by Word Adjacency,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67 (2016), 232–56, p. 246.
[18] Pascale Aebischer, 'Silence, Rape and Politics in *Measure for Measure*: Close Readings in Theatre History,' *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26 (2008), 1-23, p. 6.

contradicts everything he has said in the scene so far, but to which he is not granted lines to reply. However, as Aebischer goes on to note, because these scenes contain apprentice boy players, they were likely to have been rehearsed for the benefit of these less-experienced actors, suggesting that there was indeed once some planned, nonverbal response in these moments that is now lost. But given the preoccupation of Shakespeare's own canon with the illegibility of women, particularly regarding their chastity and sexual availability, he was plainly well aware of the narrative instability that could result from resting the full weight of a female character's meaning on her physical responses, which are endlessly vulnerable to being misread and misreported—as even these paragraphs of speculation demonstrate. That the reader, actor, and even audience member must engage imaginatively with Lady Grey's potential reactions highlights the acts of creative decision-making that underpin the plays' historiography. The real Lady Gray's thoughts and feelings are as unknown and unknowable as Shakespeare's. Thus, this gap in the script mirrors existing gaps in the historical record, drawing attention to the fact that the very things theatre is most concerned with—the thoughts and feelings of individual people—are precisely what often go unrecorded by historians.

Characters themselves sometimes engage in the imaginative processes these gaps demand of audiences and readers, using ironic or metatheatrical awareness of their own circumstances to draw attention to the degree to which historical imperative can override individual will in a fiction based on history. The scenic unit in which Elizabeth Gray is introduced recurs in *Richard III* in slightly different circumstances, as Richard attempts to persuade her to woo her daughter on his behalf. Unlike Margaret of Anjou, whose four depictions are consistently read as forming a cohesive single character, Kavita Mudan Finn may be the only scholar to approach Elizabeth as a character with a cumulative identity

across multiple plays.[19] The case of Edward's proposal, however, demonstrates the limitations of seeking a naturalistic emotional continuity across early modern plays. Elizabeth insists in *Richard III* that she loves her King Edward (2.2.76), while in *3 Henry VI* her feelings for him are framed much more practically as fear of what will happen to her, her family, and her unborn child if Edward should lose the war (4.4). However, where the continuity of personality and opinion that contemporary readers expect is absent, she responds consistently in literary terms to the recurring scenic units in which she is placed across the two plays. As Mudan Finn illustrates, Elizabeth's relationship with irony and misrepresentation remains apparently consistent: her 'carefully equivocal language' when verbally sparring with Edward about the potential marriage returns when Shakespeare 'places her in opposition to Richard III at the climax of that play'.[20] Indeed, in that climactic exchange, Richard's inability to accurately read Elizabeth's intentions becomes a key factor in his downfall, as he departs from their conversation thinking he has won the '[r]elenting fool, and shallow, changing woman' (4.4.350) to his side, while she leaves to immediately contract a marriage between her daughter and Richard's rival for the throne, Richmond (4.5.17-8).

Reading Elizabeth and Richard's dramaturgical positions in relation to one another as coherent across the two plays suggests Richard might recognise an echo of his brother's courtship in his own attempt to woo Elizabeth to his cause, granting him a metatheatrical knowledge of the scenic unit they are enacting. As John Jowett writes in his introduction to the play, Richard bears a distinct awareness of his relationship to theatrical precedents, including 'acknowledg[ing] his kinship' with the traditional Vice figure.[21] He is thus a character particularly poised to act upon his knowledge of repeated scenic units: having

[19] Mudan Finn, pp. 145-172.
[20] Mudan Finn, p. 161.
[21] Jowett, p. 31.

watched Elizabeth's resolve crumble despite consistent resistance once, Richard thinks he can recognise her doing so once more—only in this instance, he is wrong. Or perhaps it is Elizabeth herself who is manipulating Richard's ability to see dramaturgically: the appearance of enacting the scenic unit of the helplessly relenting widow, one she knows Richard will recognise either as a dramatic set-piece or from their shared past, is what allows her to lull him into the false security that she is no longer a political threat. Scholars frequently echo Richard's assessment of Elizabeth's changeability, suggesting perhaps she departs the scene intending to follow Richard's orders, but is persuaded once again by Richmond, offstage. But these mirrored scenes in fact highlight the ambiguity of Elizabeth's consent in both instances.

Earlier in the same play, Lady Anne struggles to understand her own motives for consenting to marry Richard. Though she insists that 'To take is not to give' (1.2.188) when Richard places a ring on her finger, by Act 4, she has evidently married him—though it is entirely unclear when exactly this marriage takes place, much less how. The disbelief Richard expresses in his soliloquy immediately following their conversation is echoed by Anne herself when she recalls their strange courtship: 'When scarce the blood was well washed from [Richard's] hands / Which issued from my other angel-husband / And that dead saint which then I, weeping, followed […] Even in so short a space, my woman's heart / Grossly grew captive to his honey words' (4.1.63-75). Her derision at her own actions and her 'gross' captivity emphasise the nonsensicality of her capitulation, even from her own point of view, and draws attention to the fact that we never see the exact terms or context of her ultimate consent to marry Richard. We are left to see the marriage as a natural consequence of Anne and Richard's conversation—a progression that both of them view as unbelievable and ridiculous. This sense of a missed step is present once more in the courtship of Anne Bullen (or Boleyn) in *Henry VIII.* In her first extended scene of dialogue, Anne insists that 'By my

troth and maidenhead, / I would not be a queen' (2.3.23-4). The Old Lady, her companion, is teasingly sceptical of these protestations, the voice of the audience's awareness of the situation's dramatic irony, but Anne remains steadfast: 'I swear again, I would not be a queen / For all the world' (2.3.45-6). But when next we see Anne, she is processing to her own coronation (4.1.36SD). As with Lady Anne and Lady Grey, the transition from resistance to consent goes pointedly undepicted.

In repeated scenes of consensual confusion across three plays, particularly striking when set in contrast to the clarity of the Countess's rejection in *Edward III,* Shakespeare suggests that the moment of saying *yes* is beside the point. Shakespeare could contrive romantic scenes that offer emotional or even just intellectual logic for these marriages, as he does in *3 Henry VI*'s brief interlude with the French princess Bona. Initially mirroring Blanche's equivocal language of enforced agreement when presented with a royal marriage, Bona then speaks for herself: 'Your grant or your denial shall be mine: / Yet I confess that often ere this day, / When I have heard your king's desert recounted, / Mine ear hath tempted judgment to desire' (3.3.130-3). Shakespeare is capable of providing such language for Lady Grey or either Anne, but he does not. Instead he leaves gaps that suggest that the action itself is being propelled by forces that override individual human will, and over which individuals—or at least individual women—lack control.

For readers today, the case of Anne Bullen, whose story is very well known, illustrates this point particularly well. The Old Lady's teasing emphasises our foreknowledge of what will happen between Anne and Henry. This awareness that Anne's reluctance will ultimately, somehow, give way to acceptance softens the distance between her onstage *no* and her unseen *yes*, rendering her initial protestations, in a certain sense, irrelevant. This particular form of powerlessness recalls Benjamin Griffin's definition of the history play as a genre that 'accentuates and exploits its 'embeddedness' in the continuum of a known and

familiar history'.[22] For Griffin, a history play is defined by its sense of all that came before and will come after, and exists not in spite of, but intimately concerned with the fact that the audience may well already know what is to come. In repeatedly jumping ahead from scenes of resistance to marriage and leaving consent unspoken, Shakespeare too plays upon this sense of background knowledge, using it to draw attention to the historical framework that constrains his female characters to submit to actions that they spend all of their dialogue resisting.

This sense that individual characters do not control the outcome of these exchanges is made still more visible when historical female characters are given a chance to consent, but do so in terms that emphasise the meaninglessness of the gesture. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who frame political marriages in resolutely romantic terms, Shakespeare draws attention to the fact that these characters' consent comes in circumstances where they, like Lady Percy, 'must, of force' agree. In her reading of Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece,* Melissa E. Sanchez finds 'a cultural logic that so blurs ideas of female sexual activity and passivity that "no" and "yes" cease to have meaning as rhetorical acts'.[23] This logic seems to reappear in the history plays, where it is reinforced less by cultural norms (though they, too, contribute to the women's docile consent) than by political forces within the text, and historical forces outside of it. For example, the courtship of Princess Catherine Valois by Henry V, perhaps the most famous wooing scene in the history plays, reflects its political circumstances at every turn, catching Catherine in a double-bind of predetermined political and historical decisions that undermine the character's illusion of agency.

Recent scholarship and performances alike have shifted to a darker view of a scene long viewed as romantic, including a 2018 production by New York's Public Theatre that had

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[22] Griffin, p. 74.
[23] Melissa E. Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 98.

Henry physically threaten Catherine, at one point closing his hands around her throat. Though Alexis Soloski of *The New York Times* asserted in her review that the casting of actress Zenzi Williams as Henry meant that 'gender doesn't seem to matter' in the production, Soloski described Henry's 'violent and abusive' treatment of Catherine as derived from his 'battle-born authority', thus characterising his abuse as the intrusion of war into a space it should not enter, a violation of the codes of conduct between (military) man and (domestic) woman—or perhaps, if gender truly did not matter, simply between soldier and civilian.[24] This sense that Henry's courtship of Catherine is, symbolically, a culmination of his military conquest has been noted by critics of the text as well. Katherine Eggert reads Catherine Valois as 'embody[ing] what Henry has come to France to achieve: not just a feminine France, but France in the person of a female. And as sweetly amusing as her "language lesson" scene may be, it contains extraordinarily dark hints of how Henry's conquest of her will stand in for a purely military rape of France'.[25]

That Henry's courtship of Catherine is wooing in name only is made explicit before their conversation begins. As the King of France departs to discuss Henry's peace terms, Henry asks that he be left alone with Catherine, for 'She is our capital demand, comprised / Within the fore-rank of our articles' (5.2.96-7). After their conversation, the King of France re-enters to offer his agreement to the peace terms, terms that include '[h]is daughter first' (5.2.319). The marriage is all but agreed before Catherine and Henry are ever left alone to discuss it. In fact, Catherine has been on the table as part of a peace settlement since the Chorus's introduction to act 3. As Henry makes for Harfleur, he does so in spite of the fact that 'the King doth offer him / Catherine his daughter' as part of a potential treaty (3.0.29-30), an offer Catherine seems well aware of when she informs Alice that '*Il faut que*

[24] Alexis Soloski, 'Review: Does Power Corrupt in *Henry V*?', *New York Times,* 27 April 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/27/theater/henry-v-review-public-theater-mobile-unit.html>.
[25] Eggert, p. 87.

j'apprenne à parler [anglais]' (3.4.4) a few scenes later. The phrase '*il faut*' indicates a necessity or obligation; thus, Catherine states not that she wishes to learn English, but that she *must* learn English. Henry's arrival in France, and his threat of violent sexual conquest, requires it.

This seems at odds with the tone of the courtship scene itself, and its usual charm and humour in performance. While it is possible, as in the Public Theatre production described above, to highlight a sense of coercion and even violence, that is not what Henry's share of the text most strongly suggests. But even if the scene's humour resists reading Henry's wooing of Catherine as a delayed enactment of the sexual dominance and violence threatened at Harfleur immediately before her first appearance onstage, his courtship must at least be understood as a charade, a pretence of gaining consent when in fact the answer is already concluded, and all that matters is what 'shall please de roi mon père' (5.2.238).

This foregone conclusion is distinctly unlike the equivalent scenes in the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V,* upon which Shakespeare seems to have modelled at least some of the structure of his *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V.* This difference highlights the intentional emphasis Shakespeare places on Catherine's constrained circumstances. After winning the battle of Agincourt, the Henry of *Famous Victories* likewise presents a letter to the King of France listing his demands, though in this case there are only two: 'that immediately Henry of England be crowned King of France', and 'that after the death of the said Henry, the crown remain to him and his heirs forever' (*FV* l. 1460-1465). This play's Katherine (whom I will differentiate by spelling) is not part of the bargain—indeed, it does not seem to occur to this Henry that demanding a marriage is even possible, as he anxiously reflects on whether it would be plausible to woo the French princess under the circumstances (*FV* 1493-7). *Famous Victories'* Katherine offers a mirror image of Shakespeare's Catherine's equivocal deference to her absent father's will: 'If I were of my own direction, I

could give you answer. But seeing I stand at my father's direction, I must first know his will' (*FV* 1530). The nature of the answer she would give if she could is revealed in an aside a few lines later: 'I may think myself the happiest in the world, that is beloved of the mighty king of England' (*FV* 1540). In Catherine's case (and Blanche's, above), the necessity to submit to the will of another is used as a means to avoid revealing her own feelings, an evasiveness that implies those feelings are negative; Katherine is likewise evasive, but the writer in this instance makes sure the audience is not left in any doubt about her true affections.

This instant romance between Katherine and Henry may strike the modern reader as laughably implausible, no less an elision of convincing consent than Shakespeare's, but it is much more clearly the stuff of accepted theatrical convention than Shakespeare's silences. Such sudden love is a staple of the romantic histories, a genre in which the symbolic use of unwilling potential romantic partners makes explicit acceptance of marriage essential. In Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,* for example, Princess Elinor declares that she admired Edward at the sight of his portrait and happily journeyed to England to meet him (4.21-30), and that 'I lik'd thee 'fore I saw thee; now I love' (9.193). Elinor must consent: history demands it, and the negotiations for the marriage have taken place before the play begins. But Greene goes out of his way to frame her marriage with Edward as one she has partially chosen, and is happy to undertake.

Shakespeare, too, draws upon such established conventions of instant love to frame Henry's wooing of Catherine as an earnest courtship—and yet, Shakespeare places this convention within a framework that, unlike Greene or the anonymous author of *Famous Victories*, repeatedly separates the question of love and the question of consent to marriage. He does this first by presenting Catherine's marriage as an explicit bargaining chip within the story, and then by drawing repeated attention to its broader historical framework through the

Chorus's reminders that even apparent suspense is in service of a foregone conclusion. Catherine herself

> forces historical awareness upon the audience […] When Henry asks her what to him no doubt seems a rhetorical question, whether they shall "compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard," she answers, with all the knowledge of a woman who has already seen Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays [where matters do not go nearly so triumphantly for their son]: "I do not know dat."[26]

This historical awareness undermines the 'future […] Henry believes he is forging', as Eggert writes, but it also undermines Catherine's sceptical resistance to the match. [27] Even if her marriage had not already been concluded by treaty, it has been concluded by history.

But what is to be made of the fact that the courtship scene is often so charming in performance? While the Public Theatre's production let Henry's battlefield violence spill over into peacetime, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 2018 production, directed by Rosa Joshi, presented a Henry who was emotionally drained by the war he had perpetrated, breaking into exhausted sobs at the news of their victory at Agincourt. His courtship of Catherine seemed, therefore, to be an active effort to move forward by a different means: not a continuation of his rhetoric of sexual violence, but a determined break from it. Jessica Ko's Catherine was proud of her own efforts to speak English, and her glee at Henry's bad French levelled the playing field between them, allowing for a growing flirtation that culminated in them rushing away from one another, embarrassed, when the French King and other courtiers returned to the room while they were still in an embrace. But Catherine has no dialogue to explicitly support this reading. As with Lady Grey, discussed above, performing her active consent depends on unrecorded and unwritten physical and verbal signs of pleasure—signs that Henry's responses can be read to suggest she is indeed giving, and that the scene's performance history indicates are easy to apply. But even so, her responses—again, none of

[26] Eggert, pp. 94-5.
[27] Ibid.

which are unequivocal agreement—are framed by reminders that her willingness or failure to consent cannot actually change the scene's outcome.

Across the history plays, in the face of this and similar powerlessness, Shakespeare deliberately embeds quiet resistance—including Catherine's resistance to just saying *yes*—that should not be overlooked simply because it is ineffectual. Recognising these moments of failed intervention and elided consent as examples of curtailed agency rather than bland submission revives the importance of these female characters as political actors, highlighting their power and their inevitably unrealised potential to derail history. This reading challenges the conventional understanding of a history play as driven by 'the private thoughts and agendas that are the engine of recorded history',[28] instead encoding a suggestion of the reverse—that it is history that drives the private agendas—within the female characters who exist at the margins of the power these plays are commonly understood to be devoted to depicting. These characters are thus doubly disempowered, separated both from in-play political power that would enable them to meaningfully intervene in the events they seek to alter, and from the extra-textual structural power that would allow them to act as agents, not victims, of the demands of history.

The domestic realm

Existing at the margins of power is not the same as being on the margins of the storytelling. Discussing female characters in terms of a separation into the 'domestic' or 'private' sphere is a commonplace of criticism of the history plays. For Phyllis Rackin and Jean Howard, female characters aside from Margaret of Anjou, Joan of Arc, Constance, and Eleanor are

[28] Michael Ullyot, 'Seneca and the Early Elizabethan History Play' in *English Historical Drama, 1500-1660: Forms Outside the Canon,* ed. by Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 98-124, p. 114.

'enclosed in domestic settings and confined to domestic roles'.[29] Dillon calls the chapter in which she discusses female characters 'Bodies and Objects in Domestic Space', a definition 'not primarily driven by location' but 'by the nature of the interaction they portray'. That is, 'highly personal interaction', or 'scenes [that] are often, strictly speaking, excessive, extraneous to need and additions to the chronicle sources […] Very often they include women or children as a way of insisting on an alternate perspective to the predominantly male world of politics, battle, and the struggle for power'.[30] A domestic scene 'deals with the private life of the emotions and private exchanges between women'.[31] While Dillon does discuss one all-male scene (that between Hubert and Prince Arthur in *King John*), in practice, the presence of female characters seems to be most reliable indicator of a domestic scene, for Dillon herself acknowledges that several of the scenes and characters she describes, such as Lady Percy's intercession discussed above, are in fact political.[32]

The separation into public and private (or domestic) derives to a certain extent from a historicist perspective that seeks to contextualise female characters in terms of the actual legal status of early modern Englishwomen. Howard and Rackin, for example, draw repeatedly upon the principle of the *feme couvert,* 'a married woman […] whose identity was legally subsumed in that of her husband'.[33] However, as Marianne Novy highlights, there is currently no scholarly consensus about the degree to which such a division between the (masculine) public sphere and the (feminine) private, domestic realm would have been recognised as fully developed in the early modern period.[34] Furthermore, insistence on this historically-based division has obscured what the plays actually do with these characters structurally, overstating the degree to which dramatic representation is fully reflective of

[29] Howard and Rackin, p. 137.
[30] Dillon, pp. 68-9.
[31] Dillon, p. 72.
[32] Dillon, p. 73.
[33] Howard and Rackin, p. 207.
[34] Marianne Novy, *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 146.

literal social practice. It is a reminder once again of the necessity of reading these characters not as women subject to the real-world laws and social expectations of early modern England, but roles designed to operate within a theatrical framework with laws and needs of its own. By drawing the scenes traditionally cordoned off under the label of 'domestic' or 'private' into the main current of the plays' plots and themes, they, like the marriages discussed above, demand an expansion of our understanding of the plays' political and historiographical interests. These scenes transform a theatrical world that centralises men and marginalises women into one that uses women as a sometimes unexpected but essential source of connection and commentary, often rooted in their seemingly marginal position.

The limitations of domesticity or the private as analytical categories are made obvious in John Garrison, Kyle Pivetti, and Vanessa Rapatz's reading of Catherine in *Henry V.* They suggest that while 'ostensibly excluded from masculine political spheres', Catherine is in fact forming a 'clandestine female community [that] emerges onstage to threaten fathers, husbands, and kings with the ambiguity of unseen and unheard collaboration'.[35] This just-offstage world of female conspiracy means that 'Henry might insist [Catherine] accept him as a husband in public, but he cannot know if she does so in private'.[36] Their sharp segregation of the public and private makes little theatrical sense: Catherine is not a human being with an offstage life, but an onstage character whose private feminine collaborations with Alice are explicitly depicted by Shakespeare as a process of surrender to the necessity that she learn English. Furthermore, there is no meaningful difference between the public and private acceptance of marriage suggested in the quotation above, especially for a couple who, we are assured in the play's epilogue, do indeed have a son—though not the promising warrior Henry envisions. Garrison, Pivetti, and Rapatz's analysis demonstrates, however, the logical

[35] John Garrison, Kyle Pivetti, and Vanessa Rapatz, 'Navigating Shakespearean Representations of Female Collaboration' in *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World,* ed. by Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 251-288, p. 252.
[36] Garrison, Pivetti, and Rapatz, p. 255.

extreme of a long history of criticism of these characters that takes their fundamental separation from the 'main' story as a given. But this separation is neither as obvious not as essential as its default status in criticism suggests; as Alison Thorne writes, '[w]hat might be construed as an irrelevant detour from the linear syntax of history […] reveals itself, from a different standpoint, as a door opening briefly onto areas of social history that were largely occluded by the state-centred focus of most Tudor historiography but that we have since come to value'.[37] Both of these essays use the metaphor of a door, though their differences in terminology are instructive: Thorne describes a 'door opening'; for the other trio, 'the closet door fails'.[38] Garrison, Pivetti, and Rapatz assume that the starting place is a temporary failure of exclusion through which Catherine inadvertently slips, while Thorne suggests an intentional opening into a different perspective. More importantly, Garrison, Pivetti, and Rapatz imagine a separate life for Catherine that somehow exists offstage, where Thorne's analysis is limited to possibilities available in events that actually occur onstage. Though my discussion of open silences above highlights the imaginative potential that these silenced female characters invite, it is still essential to consider them not as human women with full, undepicted lives, but characters whose existence is limited to the time they spend in view of the audience, or offstage events described to us.

As highlighted above, recent criticism generally recognises the presence of the political within the apparently private space of Catherine and Henry's courtship. Jordi Coral, for example, illustrates how rape and military conquest are metaphors for one another throughout the play, a linking that culminates in Henry and Catherine's final scene.[39] Unlike

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[37] Alison Thorne, ''There is a history in all men's lives': Reinventing History in *2 Henry IV*' in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories,* ed. by Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves, and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2006), p. 58.
[38] Garrison, Pivetti, and Rapatz, p. 252.
[39] Jordi Coral, ''Maiden Walls That War Hath Never Entered': Rape and Post-Chivalric Military Culture in Shakespeare's *Henry V*,' *College Literature*, 44 (2017), 404-35. See also: Eggert; Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Marjorie Rubright, 'Incorporating Kate: The Myth of Monolingualism in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*' in *The Oxford*

Garrison, Pivetti, and Rapatz's exclusion-based reading, Coral's recognises that we must attend to closely to what the plays are actually doing structurally and linguistically, rather than just assuming exclusion from the central narrative on the basis of the setting of the scenes and the gender of their characters. By taking the segregation of female characters into the 'domestic' as a premise, any reading that understands female characters as essential to the plays' historical dramaturgy is cut off before it can begin.

Like Coral, Molly Smith looks to language to argue for the importance of *Richard II*'s apparently domestic female characters to the play's broader themes. Critiquing the tendency of previous analyses of the play to 'equat[e] length of female presence on the stage with textual significance', she insists upon the importance of what she deems the 'mutant' and 'minor' scenes featuring female characters, often overlooked as inessential.[40] She highlights, for example, the Duchess of Gloucester in *Richard II,* who spends her single scene unsuccessfully attempting to encourage her brother-in-law Gaunt to help avenge her husband's murder. Smith argues that 'despite the Duchess of Gloucester's marginal role in the text of the play, her concerns mould our vision of Richard as monarch, and Gaunt's famous censure of Richard draws force and legitimacy from her earlier grief'.[41] The Duchess of Gloucester's influence on Gaunt, who transforms from urging patience towards Richard into his most scathing critic, is best understood as a political intervention: an apparent failure in the moment, but one whose force is gradually felt, for, as Smith notes, Gaunt borrows the Duchess's linguistic style to condemn Richard in later scenes.

Smith sees a direct line between the Duchess of Gloucester at the beginning of the play and the Duchess of York at the end, both of whom make a plea for royal justice and

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Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment ed. by Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 468-490.

[40] Molly Smith, 'Minor Scenes and "Mutant" Conflicts in *Richard II*' in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare,* ed. by Dympna Callaghan (Malden: Blackwell, 2016), 281-293.

[41] Smith, p. 286.

receive very different responses: 'the association of these [York family] scenes with the new monarchy in place at the end of the play and with a modified ideology of kingship is hard to miss […] Through the Duchess of York's actions, strategically placed in the concluding act and in Henry's court, Shakespeare deliberately continues and concludes an argument initiated in the opening act of the play by the Duchess of Gloucester'.[42] The two Duchesses bookend the play's central questions about the nature of kingship, and Richard and Bolingbroke's competing visions of England and monarchy, distilling the difference into the Duchesses' parallel pleas for justice. To dismiss these scenes as extraneous, however, is to gloss over this echo entirely.

When we cease to take as a given that female characters exist in a category of their own, even the most resolutely private characters can reveal intimate connections to the plays' broader historical dramaturgy, a connection that is sometimes dependent upon their politically marginal status. Looking again to *Richard II*, most of the Queen's stage time in the play is devoted to emphasising her marginalisation: she is left behind when Richard goes to Ireland (2.2), is the last to learn that he has been deposed (3.4), and is exiled to France in the wake of his imprisonment (5.1). But the dramatisation of her personal exclusion is essential to the play's dramaturgy and historiography in a way that characterising her presence as a domestic or private subplot obscures. Like Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III,* discussed in the previous chapter, the Queen's scenes are often used to deliver essential information for the first time. Her exclusion becomes the audience's exclusion as well, for we learn about Bolingbroke's arrival back in England, Richard's official deposition, and his sentencing to confinement in Pomfret, the castle in which he was famously killed, only when she does. Her persistent sense of melancholy foreboding might likewise ally her with an audience who partly knows what's to come, from the play's title and genre (*The Tragedy of King Richard*

[42] Smith, p. 286.

the second in the first surviving quarto edition, from 1597) if not from their knowledge of history.

Reading the Queen as a spectator is indeed a kind of marginalisation, but in the most practical terms, theatre cannot exist without an audience, a fact of which the self-consciously theatrical titular king is particularly aware. Scott McMillin's reading of the play suggests an essential unity between the Queen's distorted perspective on events and Richard's yearning for a new kind of self-definition, separate from the performative politics that defined his reign. After his deposition, Richard 'progresses toward something intractable to the theatre, something summarized by the word "unseen" in both the Queen's experience of grief and in Richard's journey towards loss, something that takes the form of being entombed, graved, walled from sight, immured. Richard is immured from the spectators of England in his final prison soliloquy, and this is only a stage on the way toward the final immuring, when his coffin is presented to the new King and to us at the same time'.[43] However, even when immured from the sight of his countrymen, Richard gives his prison soliloquy—his only speech delivered without the presence of an onstage audience—to the real-world audience. Even alone, he is not unseen, again recalling the contradictory position the Queen and the audience share: able to see the unseen, yet still unable to know anything they are not directly told.

Through this positioning, the Queen transcends the category of the private, reinforcing instead the inescapable publicness of her position as watcher and watched. As Chris Fitter notes, 'theatrical vitality, generated by ludic bonding with spectators, has the potential to transform a play's meaning' based on 'the audience member's interest and attachments'.[44] The meaning, or rather many potential meanings of a scene cannot be

[43] Scott McMillin, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Eyes of Sorrow, Eyes of Desire,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (1984), 40-52, p. 49.
[44] Chris Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare: Politics and Stagecraft in the Early Career*, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 9.

separated from the viewer encountering it. Susan Bennett argues 'theatre audiences bring to any performance a horizon of cultural and ideological expectations' that cannot be disregarded when considering the range of possible audience responses to a work.[45] But the Queen's presence as transformative spectator incorporates rather than excludes her marginalised perspective into the play's ideological horizon and narrative frame. She shifts the Gardeners' gossip into the scene of a tragedy—reflected in the Gardener's movement from demanding the garden be pruned and trimmed in a parody of governance at the beginning of the scene (3.4.33-4) to planning, by the end, to plant 'a bank of rue […] In the remembrance of a weeping queen' (3.4.105-7)—and thereby fundamentally alters the shape of the encounter, pulling both onstage characters and offstage audience into her worldview.

Like Shakespeare's many fickle onstage crowds, the Queen serves as a reminder that the perception of the audience transforms the meaning of the plays they watch—and thus, in a history play, the arc and purpose of the historical lesson itself. Thomas Nashe may have famously imagined the character of Talbot 'new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators', but some of them surely laughed when Joan la Pucelle mocked his litany of lofty titles in death.[46] Ralf Hertel suggests there is an 'intrinsic openness of drama that creates engagement—one has to place oneself within the web of standpoints offered—and that turns it into a site of controversy and negotiation rather than of mere propaganda'.[47] Such openness is reflected in the Queen, whose presence, like that constituting the 'open silences' of Lady Grey and Anne Bullen, probes at the boundaries of a play's ability to control meaning. This lack of control seriously troubles conventional understandings of the didactic and patriotic purpose of a history play, as the subtly subversive voices of these female characters speak to

[45] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 165.
[46] Nashe, p. 1010.
[47] Hertel, p. 26-7.

an awareness of the fact that many audience members will see themselves not in the moral lessons of the figures in power, but in those who lack the ability to influence their actions.

Such pockets of marginalised sympathy are not limited to queens and aristocrats: Kay Stanton describes how, in the *Henry IV* plays, 'Shakespeare pauses the dramatic action registering this crucial transition in England's history to depict some aspects of the lives of […] women who have had to involve themselves in prostitution in order to deal with the realities of social, economic, and political upheavals accompanying and consequent of civil uprising and international conquest'.[48] Stanton refers specifically to Hostess Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, but across the canon of history plays, lower-class women are described in similar terms of extraneousness to those that characterise discussions of upper-class women. Stanton's description of Shakespeare 'paus[ing] the dramatic action' clearly separates these characters from the central plot, suggesting they are not merely a detour from, but a complete arresting of the story.

Not all lower-class women are thrust to the margins of the narrative, of course: Joan la Pucelle is a notable exception in the history plays. But as Stanton suggests, most of these characters, like their upper-class counterparts, bear the consequences of decisions beyond their control. As Paola Pugliatti writes, 'Shakespeare's commoners are not many, and they never rise, in number and in sort, above the figures of power. But they are frankly popular, and in many cases they are summoned at fateful junctions of the story, where they are allowed to have their say about the momentous events at hand'.[49] In contrast to Stanton's framing of their role as a pause in the action, Pugliatti's description illuminates the structural similarity of these lower-class characters to the aristocratic female characters discussed in

[48] Kay Stanton, *Shakespeare's 'Whores': Erotics, Politics and Poetics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 51.
[49] Pugliatti, p. 185.

this chapter so far, as similar glimpses of alternate perspectives that are not fully admitted into the plot, but are essential in their marginality.

As demonstrated by the case of Anne of Bohemia at the beginning of this chapter, female nobility and the commons are often linked implicitly or explicitly, and both often serve to critique or destabilise the smooth progress of events directed by men in power. In *Richard III*, for example, Thomas Cartelli finds that Margaret and Queen Elizabeth are joined with the citizens in being the only characters entirely unimpressed and unpersuaded by Richard's theatrics.[50] While Andy Wood points out that 'there are no woman rebels in *2 Henry VI*' and that 'this is indicative of the broader dramatic and historical treatment of rebellion in the early modern period',[51] as with the abbreviated interventions discussed above, this reading overlooks the extent to which Shakespeare's lower-class female characters are engaged in disrupting and questioning the political hegemony, both literally and structurally, by means less overt than armed rebellion.

Wood's comment also overlooks a pointed but complicated exception to his generalisation about woman rebels, one attributed partly to Shakespeare: Doll Williamson in *Sir Thomas More,* a play that survives only in manuscript and was likely never performed in the early modern period. A primary victim of the censor's proposed cuts, the character of Doll is one of the leading anti-immigrant rebels calmed by More, and it is she who is about to be hanged when word arrives that More has successfully pleaded for their pardon. Though her most prominent scenes are not attributed to Shakespeare, there is, as John Jowett highlights, a key Shakespearean resonance in the character. She is one of only a handful of characters in the period named Doll, each of whom is 'a feisty London citizen; in some

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[50] Thomas Cartelli, 'The Speaking Silence of Citizens in Shakespeare's *Richard III*: Hidden and Public Transcripts' in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History,* ed. by Chris Fitter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 102-122, p. 106.
[51] Andy Wood, 'Brave Minds and Hard Hands: Work, Drama, and Social Relations in the Hungry 1590s' in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History,* ed. by Chris Fitter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84-100, p. 91.

[plays] she is potentially or actually a prostitute'.[52] One other such character is, of course, Shakespeare's Doll Tearsheet.

In Doll Williamson and her attempted rape by the foreigners she riots against (all suggested for excision by the censor, Edmund Tilney), Jowett sees a role not unlike the women of the comedic histories: 'she might have been emblematic of City, nation, or religion. Her resistance to rape might even have offered a reminder of Queen Elizabeth's opposition to threatened invasion from Spain'. But the censor's required tempering of the play's religious politics, Jowett notes, disrupts this connection.[53] Further, Tilney's demand to '[l]eave out the insurrection wholly and the cause thereof' (139) erases the specifically sexual nature of Doll's grievances against the foreigners; her attempted rape by Barde, a Lombard, opens the original first scene of the play (1.1). Doll therefore provides a very literal example of the ways in which lower-class female experience is deemed inappropriate historical material. Jowett proposes a parallel between 'More as a liminal figure in early modern England and the play of *Sir Thomas More* as a liminal text within the Shakespearean canon';[54] the same might be said of Doll Williamson. The fact that Doll's excised lines speak more of xenophobic fantasies of foreign sexual threats than the likely realities of female experience does not erase the fact that her disrupted contribution adds an important dimension to the riot's more commonly accepted economic and religious facets, and that her perspective—specifically female in its sexual aspect and articulated by Doll herself, not only as a report from her husband—is ultimately prevented from entering the canon of early modern performance and of the Shakespearean history play.

In a smaller-scale example, Pugliatti highlights the case of Simon Simpcox and his wife in *2 Henry IV.* She finds that their presence alludes anachronistically to contemporary

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[52] John Jowett, 'Introduction' in *Sir Thomas More,* Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 30.
[53] Jowett, *More,* p. 31.
[54] Jowett, *More,* p. 8.

treatment of vagrants rather than their supposedly medieval context: 'In the sources, in fact, the beggar (who is not given a name) appears an instrument of corrupted priests (indeed, his personal motivations for feigning the miracle are difficult to grasp), while Shakespeare focuses on Simpcox and his wife and makes their forgery spring from need'.[55] Specifically, it is Simpcox's Wife—a character added by Shakespeare—who introduces this economic element. Once Simpcox's deception is revealed, as she and her husband flee from the Duke of Gloucester's threats of whipping, she protests, 'Alas, sir, we did it for pure need'. Gloucester is entirely unmoved: 'Let them be whipped through every market town / Till they come to Berwick, from whence they came' (2.1.130-3). Even though the other characters do not acknowledge it, Maya Mathur notes that 'the unmasking of imposture does not disqualify the vagrants' grievances; rather, Cade and Simpcox become victims of economic inequality at the very moment of their exposure'.[56] And it is not Simpcox himself, but his wife who articulates this fact, exposing an unexpected strain of cruelty in the Duke of Gloucester's virtuous persona. It is the female character, added by Shakespeare, who is the conduit for this alternate perspective.

Hostess Quickly of the *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V* is often read as performing the same revelatory role in a comic mode, accidentally letting unintended truths slip through her malapropisms as '[h]er character is both defined and undone by her absurdly original speech'.[57] This is a peculiar kind of silencing, reliant not on literally preventing or curtailing her speech, but on undermining her control over its meaning. Thorne highlights the Hostess's importance as a bearer of a localised oral history—her memories, Bulman agrees, are uniquely characterised 'by details of her material surroundings', rooting her in an

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[55] Pugliatti, p. 214-5.
[56] Maya Mathur, 'An Attack of the Clowns: Comedy, Vagrancy, and the Elizabethan History Play,' *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 7 (2007), 33-54, p. 41.
[57] James C. Bulman, '*Henry IV Parts 1 and 2'* in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays,* ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 158-176, p. 170.

anachronistic sixteenth century present even as she looks to her own past.[58] But these memories derive comedy from their double layers of meaning: what the Hostess says, and what listeners both onstage and in the audience understand. Her bawdy malapropisms and puns, of which she seems entirely unaware, deprive her of power over her own speech, silencing her by leaving the definition of her words' meaning to others. This form of silencing is echoed in a pattern Fiona McNeill finds throughout Shakespeare's canon, whereby '[p]oor women often do not get to speak for themselves, even as boy actors. They are recollected and remembered from somewhere offstage. Yet they are persistent in the minds of the characters, present in the conversation although not always participant'.[59] As with Mistress Quickly, their invisible presence is mediated through the words of others, and left to the imagination of the audience to fully define.

The darker potential of such forced redefinition was explored in Phyllida Lloyd's adaptation of both parts of *Henry IV,* the second play in her all-female Shakespeare Trilogy originally produced at the Donmar Warehouse in 2014. Zainab Hasan, who played Hostess Quickly in every iteration of the production, stripped away much of the character's comic befuddlement, presenting her instead as proud and assertive, with much of her misspeaking glossed over or cut. But in the scene designated 3.3 by the Oxford edition of *1 Henry IV*, the production's framing device—that female prisoners were performing the play—temporarily broke into the drama, as the actors playing Hal, Falstaff, and Bardolph began taunting Hostess Quickly with sexual insults that were clearly not Shakespearean: 'Sex with you is like throwing a sausage up a street' and 'You've got a snatch like a clown's pocket', among others (quotations taken from the 2018 BBC broadcast). Breaking out of the Hostess Quickly character into her prisoner-character, an increasingly tearful Hasan finally burst out, 'Do you

[58] Thorne, 'There is a history', p. 58; Bulman, p. 170.
[59] Fiona McNeill, *Poor Women in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 10.

think that's funny? You're disgusting! We agreed that we weren't going to do this bit!' In her review of the 2014 production, Jacqueline Rose describes this as one of the play's 'most unsettling moments', and despite its brevity, it was highlighted in several reviews.[60] In addition to crystallising Lloyd's adaptation's engagement with its prison framing device, the moment underlines the fundamental instability of the role of Hostess Quickly. Even an attempt to depict the character as a fiery equal ultimately had to be punctured with crude and unjust reminders of her unruly sexuality, her right to fully participate in the play's history-making questioned by voices from both within and without the frame of the play, just as the textual Hostess Quickly is undermined by Hal, Falstaff, and the audience's awareness of the unintended meaning of her speech. Her continual double meanings thus mirror, in a different tone, the imaginative space generated by the contradictions between Lady Grey's speech, offstage actions, and descriptions by onstage characters: the full story is told not by the text, but by the audience's experience of it.

Historical fictions

As McNeill writes in her study of poor women in early modern drama, '[t]he textual production of capitalism—that is the rise in bureaucratic record-keeping—was dependent upon creating the absence of women—pushing them to the margins of the [bureaucratic] text'. This marginalisation means that 'poor women are more often than not written out of history rather than into it'. However, McNeill argues that we too readily extend this absence from the historical record into an assumed absence from the drama, an assumption exacerbated by the fact that many poor female characters inhabit spaces between the

[60] Jacqueline Rose, 'At the Donmar,' *London Review of Books* 36.23 (2014) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n23/jacqueline-rose/at-the-donmar>. See also Gemma Miller, '*Henry IV* by Donmar Warehouse, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33 (2015), 369–72 and Peter Kirwan, '*Henry IV* (Donmar/Illuminations) @ BBC iPlayer,' *Bardathon* <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2018/07/19/henry-iv-donmar-illuminations-bbc-iplayer/>.

categories of femininity—virgin, wife, widow, prostitute—that are most readily recognised by critics. But '[w]hen poor women shift [between and around categories] in the early modern drama they stage the sometimes toxic friction between legal constraints on femininity and the improvisational possibilities for poor women in the larger culture'.[61] This friction recalls that which I have described above, the tension Shakespeare generates between the possibilities of self-determination that theatre's character-based nature supposedly explores, and the constraints of a genre defined by its basis in known events. The 'improvisational possibilities' created by audience members' ability to read these characters on their own individual terms depend on the fact that these characters exist at the margins of the narrative and the culture, with Shakespeare unwilling or unable to conceive of a dramaturgical framework that can admit them fully.

And yet, at work here is something subtler than simply patriarchal and classist exclusion—for these characters are *not* fully excluded. Rather, through them, as Pugliatti writes,

> the mimesis of the greater, visible history crystallised in history books is rendered more varied and complex by the light which is shed on the obscure zone of invisible history […] at those moments during which the dramatist explores the unrecorded possibilities of lost truths, a sense of the individuality, peculiarity and uniqueness of the represented events emerges, so that the intuition of the peculiar and distinct is transmitted from the margins to the core of historical events.[62]

While Stuart Hampton-Reeves finds, for example, that the 'semi-historical intervention' of Jack Cade seems to suspend 'the structure of history itself',[63] Shakespeare's semi-fictional incursions into the lives of both aristocratic and lower-class female characters *are* history itself. But it is not history rooted in chronicles or documents; rather, like the open silences

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[61] McNeill, pp. 7, 11.
[62] Pugliatti, p. 186.
[63] Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'Kent's Best Man: Radical Chorographic Consciousness and the Identity Politics of Local History in Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*,' *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 14 (2014), 63-87, p. 68.

discussed above, this 'invisible history' must be filled in imaginatively by both playwright and spectator. Recognising this imaginative element of the history plays is essential to understanding both why these minor characters have been so insistently misread, and why doing so underestimates the importance of their contributions to the plays' dramaturgy. 'Domestic' scenes and lower class characters feel extraneous because they undermine the history play's premise of historical authenticity—a premise more highly prized now than in the early modern period, as discussed in the previous chapter. By providing, as Thorne puts it, 'a door opening briefly' into areas of history unrecorded by Tudor chroniclers, these scenes feel like digressions because they are the scenes where even the most informed reader cannot know what will happen.[64]

Situated at the margins of the action, the female characters of this chapter insistently blur the divide between history and fiction. Doll Tearsheet, Hostess Quickly, Doll Williamson, and the heroines of the romantic histories are fully fictional, but they are also reminders of the ordinary people who witnessed, accompanied, and facilitated the events of history from just behind and beyond the boundaries of the historical record. Even when it comes to female characters directly derived from the historical sources, we often assume a strict relationship to history that is not entirely clear or present in the text. The Queen of *Richard II*, for example, is frequently referred to as Isabel or Isabella in criticism, often with no acknowledgement that she is never called by that name in the play, either by characters or in stage directions. She shares some similarities with the historical Isabella: she is married to King Richard, of course, and she is French. But she diverges from history in what would likely be considered Isabella's most striking characteristic: at the time of Richard's death, Queen Isabella was nine years old. Paired with her lack of name, it seems plausible that the

[64] Thorne, 'There is a history,' p. 58.

character was conceived not as the actual Isabella at all, but as a relatively generic Queen figure—a fictional Queen character, not a historical personage.

A similar case is that of Lady Percy, Hotspur's wife. The confusion about her first name has been well-documented: given (repeatedly) as Kate in Shakespeare's play, she was historically named Elizabeth, but chroniclers Holinshed and Hall both call her Elinor.[65] Her family tree is likewise muddled. The historical Elizabeth Percy was not the sister of the Edmund Mortimer who staked a claim to the throne, but his aunt. An Edmund, Earl of March was indeed Elizabeth's brother, but this elder Edmund was not Richard's heir. It may seem a trivial mistake, but without this connection, Hotspur's implied right to England through his wife—a connection hinted at but curiously never directly explored—disappears, changing the tenor of Hotspur's claim to a third of the country. Kate Percy, ahistorical sister to the Edmund Mortimer named as Richard's heir, transforms Hotspur's position in relation to King Henry, and thus his role in the rebellion. Her fictional kinship connections reshape the plot. Laurie E. Maguire notes that Kate Percy's renaming aligns her with Shakespeare's other Kates—Kate Minola of *The Taming of the Shrew,* the Kate Valois and Kate of Aragon yet to come in *Henry V* and *Henry VIII*—a parallel that, Maguire demonstrates, goes deeper than a shared name. All are K/Catherines re-christened as Kate, an act that carries a great deal of symbolic weight in both *Shrew* and *Henry V.*[66] Gordon McMullan similarly highlights the nicknaming of Katherine of Aragon as proof that 'Katherine is, like all dramatic characters […] a construct, pieced together from prior textual material' including *Henry V* and *The Taming of the Shrew.*[67] He does not highlight Kate Percy as one such example, but she is: renamed not by her husband, but by Shakespeare himself, a cross-play connection that suggests a lack of interest in Elizabeth Mortimer the historical figure. His Lady Percy is not fully a historical

[65] Maguire, p. 131.
[66] Maguire, p. 158.
[67] Gordon McMullan, 'Introduction' in *Henry VIII,* Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 124.

person, but a character to be renamed and redeployed for his own storytelling purposes. Yet she is not fully fictional, either. Lady Percy's dramatic potential is still limited by her roots in history. She must consent, 'of force', to her husband's plans. She cannot refuse to follow him or refuse to cooperate. The power to say *no* is to be found almost exclusively in the purely fictional female characters of the romantic histories—and even then, those who do not subsequently say *yes* to someone else quickly disappear from the narrative.

As characters whose interactions with the male historical characters are wholly or largely fictional, the romantic histories' would-be lovers have the power to negate themselves, to absent themselves from the historical narrative by refusing to participate. A historical female character has no such power, for if she is not to marry, then why, under the patriarchal framework of traditional history, would she be in the story at all? This is the dual marginalisation of the female characters of this chapter: from the political power to contribute forcefully to the play's events, and what I call the structural power to escape or shape the already-inevitable outcomes the plays' source material forces upon them. Thus positioned, there is no other anchor in patriarchal history aside from those provided by male relations, particularly spouses. The fictional women of the historical comedies have the power to undertake such self-erasure when they refuse to become mistresses or wives. For Shakespeare's women, these are the terms that render their ability to consent meaningless: they cannot remove themselves from the story, and thus cannot refuse to consent to the roles that grant them entry into the patriarchal world of the history play—but in entering, they bring the imaginative possibilities of fiction in their wake.

Their constrained position both affirms and undermines the traditional understanding of female characters as marginalised and suppressed by patriarchal historical dramaturgy. Female characters are indeed only ever present for a reason—but that means, in turn, there is always a reason that they are present. They *could* be fully excluded, but in the case of

Shakespeare, they are not. Inhabiting the border between fact and fiction, between lost and recorded history, the female characters discussed in this chapter highlight the extent to which Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy engages imaginatively with the gaps in chronicle history, both through fictionalised female characters and through the deliberate space he leaves to acknowledge stories that Elizabethan historiography does not record. Often, as Dillon and other scholars recognise, such scenes are weighted with the emotional consequences of political actions undertaken elsewhere; however, Shakespeare's embedding of curtailed protests by female characters within the political action, not separate from it, suggests we must revise our understanding of the relationship between these two apparently separate 'spheres' of the history play—and between the history plays and the chronicle sources whose historiographical traditions to which they are generally read as unproblematically contributing.

As these first two chapters have explored, female characters have a consistently destabilising effect on the expected structure and style of the Shakespearean history play—but this is only true if we accept the longstanding assumption that history plays are concerned with replicating the chronicles, and are explicitly designed to contribute to a cultural project of patriarchal nation-building that takes the exclusion of the female as a central premise. Instead, we should understand these characters as destabilising not the history play itself, but our accepted definition of it. If we do, female characters can instead be read as part of the foundation of the plays, transforming them from a monolith into a patchwork within which female characters are deployed to fill specific structural roles, including to call into question the completeness of the chronicle vision of Elizabethan history. The full incorporation of female characters into our readings of the plays produces a historical dramaturgy centred less on the nation than around the people who comprise it, and their contradictory and

complementary understandings of its direction. Audiences, too, are provided space for their own imaginative and opinionated engagement with what they see, relying not purely on their foreknowledge or political sympathies, but with the recognition that their encounters with the text or performance can and will transform its meaning. This collaboratively-generated meaning, necessarily incomplete until it is experienced by the viewer or reader, stands at odds with the traditional view of the history play as a largely conservative, didactic nationalistic tool. While such patriarchal ideas are contained in the plays, they are one narrative of many, and readily undermined by shifting and uncontrollable audience sympathies, and by the often-sceptical presence of Shakespeare's female characters, who call from the margins a reminder that the events being witnessed are not history itself, nor England itself, but a messy, incomplete, artificially constructed play.

CHAPTER THREE | History as Exclusion: Shakespeare's Feminine Historiography

The first two chapters of this thesis have explored the integral role female characters play in shaping Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy, which I define as the process by which non-dramatic historical sources and stories are adapted for the stage. In many cases, this dramaturgy reflects a sense of Shakespeare's wider historical philosophy, specifically in the ways that features and requirements of the theatrical medium are deployed to demonstrate that history itself is multi-vocal, multi-tonal, and ideologically complex. While the plays themselves depict the events of history and female characters hold a unique structural role within that depiction, these characters also narrate history within the plays. This is an intersection of form and content that points to essential features of Shakespeare's historiography more broadly and suggests new ways to read his place within the maturing historiographical landscape of the early modern period. I call this Shakespeare's feminine historiography: a specific register and style of history-telling that emerges directly from the dramaturgical position of female characters.

Chapter 2 outlined how Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy separates female characters from power along two axes: they are deprived of political power, attempting but unable to alter the events unfolding within the plays; and they are separated from structural power, instead forced to surrender their individual will to the demands of the already-inevitable historical narrative. Just as the silencing of female characters reveals the distance between history-as-play and history-as-event, Shakespeare's feminine historiography intentionally exploits the friction between form and content that is particularly present in history plays. It is a friction that transforms the previous chapter's sense of history as an implacable driving force—hinted at by the unwilling and sometimes pointedly inexplicable concession of female characters to historical necessity—into an invisible framework that

guides and shapes not only the most marginalised female characters, but the plays as a whole. This chapter will expand on three means by which female characters narrate or otherwise attempt to rewrite history within the plays: as cursers and prophetesses, as spectators of events they cannot control, and as forces that attempt to change the very nature of the plays they are in. The differing ways these characters relate to history itself help to illuminate the shape of the historical world, constantly and actively constrained by the recorded events of the past, within which all of Shakespeare's characters operate.

Prophesying the past

Literary critics have long recognised that certain forms and styles of speech are particularly associated with female characters in Shakespeare's history plays, and in Elizabethan culture at large. As Marguerite A. Tassi has illustrated, '[l]aments, funeral dirges, and cursing belong to all cultures in some form or other and it is women who typically engage in these practices […] Through their bodies and voices, mourning women convey an affective ethics, making crimes known publicly and inciting revenge'.[1] This sense of the danger inherent in displays of public mourning, complaint, and lament has been increasingly widely acknowledged, in contrast to an earlier critical tradition that suggested 'lament can seem absurd because it does not recover what is lost'.[2] Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin provide the most influential articulation of this perspective, characterising the female characters in *Richard III* who engage in 'ritual lamentation, curse, and prophecy' as 'helpless, suffering wo[men]'.[3] Their understanding of the female characters of *Richard III* as powerless, however, is the portion of *Engendering A Nation* that has been subject to the most consistent and sustained revision by

[1] Tassi, p. 27.
[2] Kerrigan, p. 65.
[3] Howard and Rackin, p. 116.

later critics. Alison Thorne, for example, likewise views the mournful female characters of *Richard III* and *King John* as 'a spent force well before the end of their respective plays', ultimately incapable of seeing through their desired ends.[4] But Thorne also acknowledges the vital role that their apparently ineffective public displays of mourning play within the ethical landscape of their country, 'as custodians of England's troubled history whose memory is continually at risk of being erased or overwritten'.[5] Other critics delve more fully into the implications of this custodianship, particularly in *Richard III,* and understand the female characters' mourning not as aimless lament, but as 'speech acts' that are not only effective within the world of the play, but would have been taken very seriously in their cultural context.[6]

The concept of 'speech acts' as it is now generally used derives from J. L. Austin.[7] Austin breaks the concept down into three categories, of which the two most relevant for our purposes are illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Illocutionary acts are cases in which the act of speaking something also makes it so, as with declaring a couple married or bestowing a person with a new title. Like the curses that female characters in Shakespeare speak, an illocutionary act does not require the consent or participation of the hearer to be enacted, just as curses effect even those who do not believe in them or who reject the power of the curser. Perlocutionary acts, in contrast, demand but cannot enforce action from the hearer; this describes, as we shall see, the acts of mourning, complaint, and lament which female characters undertake. I will not argue for what I believe has been well-established by the critics cited throughout this chapter, namely, that these laments are not 'absurd' or aimless, but potent forces with direct impact on the worlds of the plays, whether because of their

[4] Thorne, 'Lawful let it be,' p. 118.
[5] Thorne, 'Lawful let it be,' p. 105.
[6] See Goodland.
[7] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [first ed. 1962]).

illocutionary power or their perlocutionary demands for action. Rather, I will take very seriously Thorne's suggestion of their custodial function, arguing that these speech acts of mourning, cursing, and complaint are also moments in which female characters act as historians. Through the unique perspective on the past that these linked linguistic styles demonstrate, female characters suggest a link between marginalisation from political and structural power and the gift of historical foresight—a connection that illuminates essential facets of Shakespeare's broader historiography.

As discussed in Chapter 1, *Richard III* is the play in which modern critics are most likely to see the contributions of female characters as part of history, reading their scenes as an essential aspect of the play's historiographical landscape rather than excessive or irrelevant digressions. It is also the play in which female lament has been most thoroughly discussed, and most clearly understood as a form of history-telling. The arguments in favour of the power of the female characters' tragic linguistic forms in this play have broadly followed two major paths: one looks forward to argue that, as Paige Martin Reynolds writes, 'memory through female mourning determines the future';[8] and the other looks backwards to see the play, as Thorne, Tobias Döring, and others have argued, as a 'battle of memories', a contest over who will get to define the narrative of the past.[9] As we shall see, however, these understandings are complementary, not contradictory.

The first path, by which Reynolds and others argue that women's laments and curses have direct, actual impact on the events of *Richard III*, was perhaps overlooked for so long because their influence is not demonstrated in strictly realistic or literal terms. For example, Tassi describes how '[t]he Duchess of York's curse upon her monstrous son, Richard III, is potent, acting upon the spirit world to draw all of his enemies together in a vengeful haunting

[8] Reynolds, p. 19.
[9] Döring, p. 54.

the night before his fateful battle'.[10] Similarly, Kirilka Stavreva notes that while 'Margaret is never restored to political power […] by the end of [*Richard III*] the arc of history is bent in the direction of her curses'.[11] The critics who have challenged Howard and Rackin's reading of these women as 'pitiable victims' in whom 'the subversive power associated with women in the earlier plays is demystified'[12] have based their arguments on this direct connection between the women's mournful and prophetic speech and the supernaturally tinged downfall of Richard.[13] Tim Carroll's 2012 production of *Richard III* for Shakespeare's Globe (my description refers to the staging used for the 2013 transfer to the Belasco Theatre in New York City) reflected this sense that there is a direct and literal connection between the female characters' speech and Richard's downfall. In Carroll's staging, the ghosts of Richard's victims returned to the stage during his final fight with Richmond, impeding Richard in battle just as they and the Duchess had prophesied. This battle sequence culminated in an act of supernatural female agency: Richard's wife Lady Anne was the last and most decisive spirit to appear. She took hold of Richmond's sword and Richard dropped to his knees in front of her, visually echoing the moment in their initial encounter when Richard offered his bared breast for her to stab in vengeance for the murder of her first husband. She raised the sword, and this gesture transformed into Richmond's death blow to Richard. Like the critiques discussed above, Carroll's staging suggested a delayed enactment of these women's curses that was not merely a coincidental or symbolic mirroring of their pleas, but directly connected to and invoked by their speech. As Katherine Goodland notes, '[t]he poetics of lament often blur the distinction between lament and revenge, reinforcing the quality of women's cries as "speech-acts" with agency'.[14] Their public mourning is not just a call to

[10] Tassi, p. 57.
[11] Kirilka Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 150.
[12] Howard and Rackin, p. 106-7.
[13] See Finn, Goodland, Karreman, and Reynolds.
[14] Goodland, p. 20.

action or lament for deeds past, but speech acts that literally generate the forms of revenge they describe. Within *Richard III,* '[l]earning to remember is learning to curse'[15]—and curses, of course, are efforts to change the future. Thus, in this understanding of the characters' role, past and future—mourning and cursing—are inextricably linked.

In this way, Döring's 'battle of memories' and a forward-looking understanding of mourning need not contradict one another. Isabel Karreman writes that there is a 'political dimension of mourning', one that the female characters perform as they attempt to disrupt Richard's rise to power. Because his rise is predicated on 'dismissing the past and his responsibility for it out of hand', his downfall takes the form of being forced to remember: 'When the ghosts of those he murdered appear on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth on All Souls' Day to tell their stories and curse their murderer, they reinstate ritual lament and, with it, historical truth'.[16] The mourners' laments, though firmly retrospective, still have a bearing upon the present as active efforts to remind that present of its past. Backwards-looking mourning and forwards-looking curses are always intimately connected in Shakespeare: female characters never curse without mourning. This is more than coincidence. Retrospective mourning, active lament, and future-altering curses are all speech acts rooted in loss—loss that, under the patriarchal framework of Shakespeare's plays and culture, is synonymous with historical marginalisation.

Margaret notably curses her rival Queen Elizabeth to '[d]ie neither mother, wife, nor England's queen' (1.3.206). Under patriarchal systems of historical record-keeping, this is tantamount to an erasure from history: why would a woman's name be documented if she was not mother (to a royal heir, is the unspoken assumption—emphasised by the fact that Elizabeth does indeed remain mother to a daughter and a son by her first husband), wife, or

[15] Wilder, p. 9.
[16] Karreman, pp. 26-8.

queen? This is precisely why these characters must narrate their own unique forms of history, rejecting what Thorne describes as 'state-sanctioned accounts of past or unfolding events […] the distortions, evasions, and omissions proffered by the political establishment in lieu of truth'.[17] The patriarchal historical records sanctioned by the state leave no room for these women once they have lost their male relations. I do not agree with Karreman's implication that the plays' historical discourses break down neatly into truth from women and falsehood from men; rather, the female characters craft a history that expresses their own interests. These interests inevitably run counter to those of the male characters whose actions have dispossessed the women of their genealogical connections to power, and have driven the women to recitations designed to redefine both history and their own contested place within it.

While scenes of mourning like those discussed here are often characterised as 'domestic', as in the scenarios critiqued in Chapter 2, this is a separation of spheres of activity that cannot be logically sustained. For female characters in history plays, loss is personal *and* political: loss of family means loss of connections to power, influence, and a place in history itself. For the women of *Richard III* however, as Kavita Mudan Finn writes, 'even after this ritual stripping of titles—wife, mother, and queen—Margaret leaves both Elizabeth and the Duchess of York with a new sense of the power of language and storytelling'.[18] This is the same process of loss that Margaret herself has already undergone 'when she is deprived of her husband and son by their deaths [... and uses] this deprivation as a means of empowerment'.[19] Their new-found power comes not in spite of this deprivation, but because of it. This is why cursing is prefaced by mourning in Shakespeare's history

[17] Thorne, 'Lawful let it be', p. 110.
[18] Mudan Finn, p. 168.
[19] L. S. Stanavage, 'Margaret of Anjou and the Rhetoric of Sovereign Revenge' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare's Queens*, ed. by Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 163-182, p. 173.

plays: because female characters must accept that they have indeed lost their connections to power, and thus may be granted access to this alternate form of narrating history. They lose political power, but gain a new kind of historical insight.

Often, female characters' alternate histories take the form of what I will call genealogies of loss—recitations of deceased family members that evoke and distort the recitations of genealogical claims to power with which, as Robert C. Jones notes, history plays are commonly associated.[20] *Richard III* offers a straightforward demonstration of this form through its 'constant rehearsal of mostly first names, by mothers, aunts, and sisters, [which] brings home more strongly than any formal list of the dead the appalling internecine murders along Richard's route to the throne'.[21] Genealogies in plays by other writers—and those spoken by Shakespeare's male characters—are distinctly different from the mourning litanies that Shakespeare places in the mouths of his female characters. Phyllis Rackin argues that the history play itself is fundamentally genealogical, a definition that renders such recitations the base unit of the genre. Therefore, Rackin argues, because of the ever-present spectre of genealogy-invalidating adultery, women 'are inevitably threatening to the historiographic enterprise'.[22] However, as I shall demonstrate, while female characters do indeed have a different relationship to genealogy than male characters, the difference is not rooted in adulterous anxieties, but rather in an effort to articulate and enable a different form of historical accounting.

History plays of the late sixteenth century often begin with a recitation of the ruler's genealogy, establishing both that king's right and, more practically, the play's broader setting for the benefit of the audience. The anonymous play *The True Tragedy of Richard III* uses a

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[20] Robert C. Jones, *These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare's Histories* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), p. 36.
[21] Piesse, p. 134.
[22] Phyllis Rackin, 'Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories,' *Theatre Journal*, 37 (1985), 329-244, p. 336.

prologue, not a historical character, to establish the events that predate the play's action. In this prologue, Truth is questioned by Poetry, and describes how the rule of England came from Henry VI, via 'Richard Plantagenet of the House of York / Claiming the crown by wars, not by descent', to the present reign of Edward IV (1.19-38). Though the account is openly critical of the Yorkist claim, it is nonetheless framed as the objective historical backdrop to the story to ensue, literally delivered by Truth itself. Shakespeare, famously, does not begin with a such a dynastic scene-setting, but rather with Richard introducing and speaking for himself. Genealogical lists like the one that begins *The True Tragedy* do not enter into Shakespeare's *Richard III* until the women introduce them with repetitive litanies of given names: 'I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him. / I had a Harry, till a Richard killed him. / Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him. / Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him' (4.4.37-40). These genealogies of loss have no interest in creating dynastic clarity—indeed, their repetition of matching first names seems designed to invoke the opposite: confusion, and the blurring of temporal and generational bounds. The incantatory quality of these speeches has often been remarked upon, drawing comparisons to the three Marys of the medieval mystery plays, the mourning women of Senecan drama, and the Greek Fates.[23] But they are also attempts at historical documentation, an 'alternative view of succession'[24] or an example of Karreman's 'politics of mourning', by which a mourner 'authorizes her particular and partial story of the past'.[25] But in Shakespeare, genealogies are always pointedly partial. Rather than an account declared from the mouth of Truth, Shakespeare openly displays the agendas and biases of male and female characters alike.

[23] See Dillon, Finn, and Goodland.
[24] Piesse, p. 134.
[25] Isabel Karreman, *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 26.

Two of the most famous examples of Shakespearean genealogies are those delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury in *Henry V,* and by Mortimer—later repeated by York—in *1 Henry VI,* discussed further in Chapter 4. While the traditional genealogy, exemplified by *True Tragedy'*s Truth, aims to establish the setting and the current dynasty so that the story can move forward, Shakespeare's male genealogists recite the past in hopes of redirecting the present, Canterbury hoping to provoke Henry V into declaring war, Mortimer in an effort to revive his family's pursuit of the crown. The female genealogies of loss are a further variation, establishing the terms of their marginalisation, and simultaneously justifying and expressing the alternate history that this exclusion from patriarchal historiographical systems allows them access to. Goodland describes these recitations in *Richard III* as a 'force that disrupts the forward, linear movement of history'.[26] This is true in more ways than one. Goodland means it fairly literally, in the sense discussed in the previous chapter: a disruption to the plot's expected progression with what seems to be a temporary swerve into less-essential narrative territory. But these female characters also trouble the linearity of the historical narrative itself, as their mourning is consistently associated with curses and prophecies that look into the future.

While the female characters of *Richard III* display this disruption of linear chronology very directly, by literally pulling the dead into the present with their forceful mourning, a subtler association can be seen in other, more infrequently discussed female characters. Blanche of Castile in *King John* is one such example. She laments not loss that has happened, but loss that is yet to come as she fails to prevent a war that will place her in an impossible position of divided loyalty (an effort discussed in depth in Chapter 2). Once it becomes clear that her pleas for peace will have no impact, she recites a genealogy that doubles as a farewell curse:

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[26] Goodland, p. 147.

> Husband, I cannot pray that thou mayst win.
> Uncle, I needs must pray that thou mayst lose.
> Father, I may not wish the fortune thine.
> Grandam, I will not wish thy wishes thrive.
> Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose.
> Assurèd loss before the match be played. (3.2.346-351).

Alternating between relatives by marriage (husband Lewis and 'father'—that is, father-in-law—the King of France) and biological ones (her uncle John and grandmother Eleanor), Blanche enacts the 'authorisation' of her grief that Karreman describes. Blanche's right to complain stems from her ties to both sides of the upcoming conflict, and she invokes these to demonstrate the 'assured loss' she is about to undergo no matter the outcome of the war. Her power, which was rooted in her momentary role as symbol of the alliance between England and France, will dissolve along with the losses she foresees. She pairs this list with ill-wishes for those she names, a gesture perhaps too mild to properly be considered a curse, and yet one that performs the curse-like function of simultaneously calling down and foretelling the losses yet to come. In what is, for her, a civil war, mourning and cursing must be one and the same, as those she stands to lose are also those to blame for her losses. Her assessment of the situation may seem too obvious to be considered a prophecy—it is inevitable that one side will lose the war and the other will win, and therefore someone Blanche is connected to will come to harm—but no one else seems either aware of or willing to acknowledge this fact, rendering Blanche's clear-eyed view of the future unique amongst the onstage characters.

Imagining this scene onstage emphasises the strangeness of Blanche's position: she delivers two full speeches that go almost entirely unacknowledged by the other characters. The speech that concludes with the litany of pre-emptive grief quoted above begins with a question: 'Which is the side which I must go withal?' (3.1.341). When Blanche reaches the end of her eleven-line speech, her husband Lewis only replies to the question of its second line: 'Lady, with me, with me thy fortune lies' (3.1.352). It is as if the intervening lines were not spoken at all. While Richard attempts to mock Margaret's prophetic speech and drown

out his mother's with the sound of drums, the characters in power in *King John* seem unwilling or unable to hear what Blanche has to say, despite how obvious her words seem to the reader or viewer.

In Blanche, therefore, we see a convergence of the forms of speech discussed in this chapter thus far as her mourning authorises, enables, and becomes a form of cursing. Because the ability to curse is dependent on marginalisation, it is always prefaced with some kind of mourning, and this mourning calls upon genealogy to demonstrate the specific terms of one's disrupted connection to the masculine historical chronologies and lines of succession that such genealogies traditionally represent. Female characters who are able to curse are thus untethered not only from history as traditionally conceived in terms of content, but also in terms of their relationship to historical time itself, the second form of the disruption to linearity that Goodland describes. The nature of their separation recalls Erika Lin's revision of Robert Weimann's influential conception of the early modern stage in terms of the *locus* and the *platea*.[27] As Clare Wright succinctly summarises, on the early modern stage, 'rather than having two distinct worlds, juxtaposed but completely separated from one another (as in naturalism), Weimann hypothesises two distinct spaces (the play world, represented by the *locus*, and the real world, inhabited by the audience) connected by the fluid *platea*, a non-time, non-space'.[28] The *locus* contains the events of the play itself, while the *platea* is the space inhabited by characters like Richard III, who have a direct relationship with the audience. Lin suggests reading the division between the two spaces as a division in what she terms 'theatrical privilege': 'regardless of who is socially privileged within the world of the play and regardless of what is privileged, thematically or otherwise, in a text based analysis,

[27] Erika Lin, 'Performance Practice and Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of Locus and Platea,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 22 (2006), 283–98.
[28] Clare Wright, 'Ontologies of Play: Reconstructing the Relationship between Audience and Act in Early English Drama,' *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 35 (2017), 187–206, p. 191.

moments in these plays that foregrounded the process by which elements presented onstage came to signify within the represented fiction were *theatrically privileged*'.[29] That is, 'the more a character is aware of the playhouse conventions upon which audience members relied and the more he or she can manipulate them within the represented fiction, the more that character is in the *platea*'.[30] Lin highlights Edgar's use of theatrical, verbal scene-setting to make Gloucester believe he is on the edge of the cliffs of Dover and Falstaff playing dead at the Battle of Shrewsbury, his fake corpse indistinguishable from Hotspur's 'real' one, to illustrate the types of theatrical convention that characters manipulate from within the *platea*.

I argue that cursing women like Blanche are likewise stepping into the *platea,* separated from the in-world events of the *locus* by virtue of their knowledge of history. What Lin describes as theatrical privilege might in this instance be called historical privilege: the ability to see the full scope of the already-written historical events, which is also a manipulation of the devices of theatre. But unlike Lin's male characters, who move easily between *locus* and *platea,* historical privilege can only be acquired at the cost of removal from political power.

The Duchess of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI* is rarely discussed as curser or prophetess, but her final actions onstage demonstrate the same arc of political disempowerment and subsequent historical privileging that we have seen in the female characters discussed thus far, representing the cost of movement from political *locus* to historical *platea*. At first, however, the Duchess's disempowerment exists only in her own mind. Her perceived separation from the power she believes her family deserves leads her to seek a path for her husband, Humphrey, to seize the throne. Tellingly, she has no supernatural abilities of her own at this point: she must hire a witch and a conjurer to prophesy for her (1.2.76-9). This

[29] Lin, pp. 294-5.
[30] Lin, p. 293.

leads directly to her husband's political downfall and her own banishment and public shaming, a double separation from the spheres of masculine historical influence. In the depth of this disgrace, she acquires the ability to see the future accurately—but only after she publicly mourns her losses. Rather than a litany of family members, Humphrey alone is the centrepiece of her laments, which focus directly on her loss of status: 'To think upon my pomp shall be my hell. / Sometimes I'll say I am Duke Humphrey's wife / And he a prince and ruler of the land' (2.4.42-4). The fact that Humphrey is not dead allows her to emphasise the heart of a loss that is, in the other characters discussed in this chapter, occluded by personal grief: she had power and a connection to the circles wherein recorded history happens, and now she has neither. Having articulated this loss, however, the Duchess gains the ability to prophesy she previously had to purchase, declaring that her husband will

> […] stir at nothing till the axe of death
> Hang over thee, as sure it shortly will.
> For Suffolk, he that can do all in all
> With her that hateth thee and hates us all,
> And York and impious Beaufort, that false priest,
> Have all limed bushes to betray thy wings;
> And fly thou how thou canst, they'll tangle thee.
> But fear not thou until thy foot be snared,
> Nor never seek prevention of thy foes (2.4.50-58).

Like Blanche, the Duchess seems to combine curse and prophecy, as her use of the imperative— 'fly thou', 'fear not thou'—makes it difficult to discern if she is cursing him to undertake these actions, or foretelling what she knows he will do. In either case, though Gloucester insists that she 'aimest all awry' (2.4.59), her words come to pass. Like Blanche and the women of *Richard III*, Duchess comes into her own prophetic ability only when she has lost everything. At the moment when she is literally on her way out of England, her husband's life, and history, she gains the ability to look forward into that history she cannot help enact, and see what is to come.

Curses and prophesies inevitably invoke what Benjamin Griffin describes as the audience's awareness of a play's 'embeddedness' within history— the awareness that the characters have a long past and future beyond the events of the play, even if a given audience member is not fully aware of what those undepicted events are.[31] As a rule, as Lina Perkins Wilder writes, '[p]lays do not have a "past". [A] "false" past […] shares the same fictional space occupied by the unstated "true" past recalled elsewhere […] the imagined past that allows for the construction of narrative'.[32] By this logic, nor do they have a future beyond that which the playwright directly depicts. But neither of these limitations apply in a history play, where what is unknown to the characters is potentially known to the audience. Lukas Lammers argues that this distance is the aim of such prophetic moments in history plays: 'the additional knowledge required [to recognise a prophesy] is not imparted to the audience by the play itself. Instead, the play counts on spectators to know this historical detail. [A] discrepancy therefore exists between the Elizabethan audience and *all* the characters in the play'.[33] But as the chapter so far has demonstrated, this last statement is not quite true. Lammers' argument points, however, to the ways prophecies disrupt the plays' temporal illusions by highlighting their own theatricality.

The women of *Richard III*, Blanche, and the Duchess of Gloucester have the ability to predict or bring about the future, which in turn serves as a momentary reminder of their fictionalised place within an actual historical continuum. The *platea* of historical privilege into which these characters step when they curse or prophesy is associated with the audience, and within that space, the characters briefly share the audience's perspective: in the present, looking at the past from the vantage point of someone who already knows the future. It is a

[31] Griffin, p. 74.
[32] Wilder, p. 141.
[33] Lukas Lammers, *Shakespearean Temporalities: History on the Early Modern Stage* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 67.

space where recollection and prophecy, auditor and actor, past and present, all momentarily become one. Thus Goodland's description of these characters disrupting the 'linear movement' of historical progress can be seen to reflect the way these characters disturb not only the progress of a political plot from beginning to end, but disrupt the inexorable forward movement of history, the sense of time as a linear stream in which one is unable to bring future knowledge to bear on what has already happened. These characters step outside of that stream, able to see it in its totality with a spectator's broad scope of vision.

Such temporal compression is not a unique conception of history in the early modern period; rather, it is reflective of the dominant historiographical trends of the time, which sought to actively contextualise the past with the present. Roughly, late sixteenth century historiography has been broken down into three major 'strains': the providential, the humanist, and the antiquarian.[34] Though modern historians recognise that this was a period of dramatic change in historiographical thought, there was not a straightforward transition from one strain to the next. Understandings of history did not switch seamlessly from the medieval providential worldview, which attributed historical events to the will of God, directly into the humanist, which derived from continental writers and was defined by an 'interest in secondary causes and human psychology, in matters of politics, and in its careful attention to rhetorical/literary style'. Rather, 'most non-antiquarian producers of historical texts at this time […] freely mixed providential historiography with a humanist emphasis on secondary causes and wedded verifiable facts with legendary materials from the chronicles'.[35] Further, Ivo Kamps notes, the marriage of the humanist and providential philosophies was more natural than it might first appear: '[i]n fact, the single most crucial premise of humanist historiography—the assumption that history can teach us about the present because history

[34] See Parvini.
[35] Ivo Kamps, *Historiography and Ideology in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 8-13.

repeats itself—closely resembles the medieval notion of time as cyclical'.[36] Though antiquarianism is the strain that looks most like contemporary historical practice with its interest in historical records and primary sources, its place as a gentleman's hobby in fact rendered it the least influential at this time.[37]

Shakespeare's plays have been read as subscribing to providentialism and humanism to varying degrees, from E. M. W. Tillyard's influential but now widely dismissed analysis of the providential arc of Shakespeare's two tetralogies to Neema Parvini's 2012 argument that 'historicism as envisioned by Shakespeare' is fundamentally humanist in character, devoted to 'analysing the key choices and actions of characters in order to discern what has contributed to their accomplishments or downfalls'.[38] Most critics—including most of those cited in this thesis so far—propose some combination of providentialism and humanism. The curses described in this chapter likewise situate Shakespeare in the transitional muddle between the two that characterised the eclectic historiography of the period. Understanding how mourning underpins these curses likewise points to the uniquely theatrical combination of providentialism and humanism that Shakespeare's histories display.

Richard III is often read as the Shakespeare play that tilts most strongly towards the providential end of the scale, thanks to its blunt resolution through ghosts and prophecy. Brian Walsh argues, however, that the ghosts are the means by which Shakespeare 'dilutes the authority of the historical tradition that would render Richard's story unambiguously the story of God's will' because they are so explicitly theatrical: '[t]he ghosts connect the expression of history as retributive justice to a burgeoning stage convention of the vengeful revenant, not to a Christian scheme of renewal'. Thus, the ghosts can be seen 'as exemplifying the human agency that goes into the construction of historical knowledge'.[39]

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[36] Kamps, p. 13.
[37] Parvini, p. 100.
[38] Parvini, p. 106.
[39] Walsh, pp. 159-61.

For Walsh, this sense of human agency is largely metatheatrical, recalling once again the power of the *platea* as conceived by Lin: the ghosts draw attention to the hand of the playwright in constructing the narrative of history itself, and in creating 'an alternative kind of historical consciousness to the written or the oral, one more transparent about the complicated dynamics by which history is formulated and circulated in culture'.[40]

I argue that the combination of ghosts and curses in *Richard III* also points to a broader historiographical current that runs beneath prophetic speech whenever it appears in Shakespeare's history plays. Curses and prophecies embed humanist agency within a providentially inflected historical arc. By linking Richard's death to the curses spoken by the mothers and widows of his victims, Shakespeare roots a downfall that appears preordained not in God's plan, but in Richard's own actions. The curses borne of mourning for Richard's victims cause his downfall—thus, Richard himself caused it. Richard reflects this cyclical sense of cause and effect in his soliloquy immediately after the ghosts' visitation:

> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard, that is, I am I.
> Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason why:
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself? (5.3.194-9).

The presence of the spirits means that this is precisely what happens: Richard will revenge himself upon himself through the enactment of the curses that his murders gave rise to. Consistently prefacing mourning with cursing provides similar reminders across the plays that these curses and their effects do not spring from impersonal providence, but from the characters' own actions—even as the female characters' placement in the metatheatrical *platea* reminds us of the historical and dramaturgical constraints that confine every characters' choices.

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[40] Walsh, p. 161.

The female characters' accurate and often highly specific prophetic curses do still create the impression that they are able to see history because it has been predetermined—at least within the *locus,* from the perspective of characters who lack their historical privilege. However, I argue that it is not the plays' belief in a providential universe that allows them to see the future, but rather the placement of history itself in the role of providence. That is, an awareness not of God's predestined will, but of the play's status as a depiction of events that have already happened and, more importantly, of a history that has already been written. Marjorie Garber highlights the specifically theatrical nature of this awareness, whereby 'even without knowledge of the chronicle account, we are conditioned as spectators and auditors by the dramatic convention of historical prophecy. The audience knows that these "impossible" things [that prophecies predict] will prove true, and it can do nothing with that knowledge but wait for the fulfilment of the future anterior—the future that is already inscribed'.[41] A knowledge of theatrical convention, in other words, can replace a knowledge of actual history in placing the audience in a parallel position to those characters who can see the future. Walsh and Kamps notice a similar awareness of the particularly theatrical potential of historical narratives in Shakespeare's plays. For Walsh, Shakespeare's history plays 'show how the performance of history does not merely reveal the conditions of historical culture but that it can also intervene in it and help shape how his audience (and audiences to come) could imaginatively and practically participate in its creation and sustenance'.[42] Chapter 2 highlighted some of the ways in which this participatory quality troubles the plays' ability to uphold any one ideological perspective; this chapter has described how a shared 'prophetic' ability generates a further source of connection, once more allying audience members

[41] Marjorie Garber, ''What's Past is Prologue': Temporality and Prophecy in Shakespeare's History Plays' in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation,* ed. by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 301-331, p. 317-8.
[42] Walsh, p. 131

perhaps less with those enacting history than with those who are, like them, watching it unfold.

Kamps sees such a destabilising theatricality only in Shakespeare's later histories, when he and other Stuart playwrights embraced the increasing eclecticism of seventeenth century historiography to 'astutely abandon a view of the prince as the repository of power and maker of history in favour of prince who is an opportunistic manipulator not merely of historical events themselves (many of which turn out to be largely beyond his control) but also, crucially, of their *representation*'. In contrast, Kamps argues, 'a concern with providence and the actions of great men generally characterizes the historical drama of Tudor Shakespeare'. Only in *Henry V* does Shakespeare complicate his early historiography by depicting Henry as a king who 'learns he is a monarch who does not simply rule *over* the historical process; it also rules him'.[43] I argue that this awareness of the presence of the historical process, the replacement of providence with history as the inescapable force that propels the characters, can be seen as early as the *Henry VI* plays in the connection between mourning and prophecy in the Duchess of Gloucester, or in *King John'*s Blanche. These characters flatten time by linking themselves to the audience through their access to historical privilege, which includes keener insight into humanistic cause and effect than the men around them are willing to acknowledge. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester specifically rejects the ability of human will to override a larger sense of justice, insisting that his enemies cannot harm him 'So long as I am loyal, true, and crimeless' (2.4.64), but the Duchess clearly sees that the world operates otherwise: Gloucester's actions have made him enemies, even if their dislike of him is, by his reckoning, unjust. Blanche's concerns are likewise answered with an invocation of forces larger than herself. The Dauphin urges that her 'fortune' rests with him, but Blanche knows that 'Where my fortune lives, there my life dies' (3.1.352-3). This

[43] Kamps, pp. 92-4.

suggests a clash that the Dauphin cannot see: while he calls upon fate, she has an eye to the material consequences of what she clearly understands not as fortune's whim, but an active decision by her family members.

For all of these mourning female characters, such insights into both causes and effects of the history yet to unfold are gained by marginalisation from political power, and thus from the power to assert one's will in a way that will lead to a presence in recorded history. Exclusion from the play's present-tense historical narrative leads to both the need and the ability to narrate alternate genealogies, and to advocate for an alternate view of the past by foretelling what is to come, exchanging political power for historical privilege: the ability to see and understand events within their full historical scope.

Marginalised historians

The connection between marginalisation and this expansive form of historical insight runs in both directions: while the female characters discussed above step outside of the narrative, expressing what is history for us but the future for the others onstage, other female characters are empowered by their exclusion from the events of the play to provide unique insight into the past. Like the mourners, however, this is always an active effort. Constance in King John, often read by critics as a disruptive but aimless presence, explicitly blends genealogy, lament, and active attempts to redirect the play's events. Phyllis Rackin points out that her speech protesting Blanche and Lewis's marriage serves to 'remind an audience that the political alliance the marriage is designed to effect would still leave Constance and Arthur and the hereditary rights they urge upon us unincorporated and unappeased',[44] a reminder as well that

[44] Rackin, 'Anti-Historians,' p. 339.

the subtext of all of Constance's speeches, including her later mourning for Arthur, is genealogical.

As examined in detail in Chapter 1, critical discussion of Constance's mourning has often been dismissive, if not outright annoyed. However, Constance states her intentions with regards to her display of grief as soon as she enters into the presence of the King and Dauphin of France: 'Lo, now, now see the issue of your peace!' (3.4.21). Thus prefaced, her mourning becomes a performance for the benefit of the King of France and his son, an action reflective of her actual feelings but also deliberately undertaken out loud and in public, before this specific audience, in order to shame them for their past deeds and to spur them to make amends. In doing so, she 'enlist[s] the rhetorical resources of complaint in order to supplement and correct a judicial system that has failed [her]'.[45] A specific and recognised literary and rhetorical form at the time, complaint, like the other linguistic strategies discussed in this chapter, is typically gendered female and is 'dependent on weakness'—the legal and social disempowerment of the individual who complains.[46] The language of complaint forces a public confrontation over grievances that cannot find formal redress, providing a means of 'calling to account those whose power and status seemingly place them beyond the reach of law'.[47] Thus, like the laments and curses discussed above, complaint is a kind of speech act, narrating history not merely to illustrate the past, but to have a direct impact on unfolding events. Constance's complaint—rooted in genealogy, as the implied reminder of Arthur's lineal claim forms the basis for Constance's lament—becomes her version of history, which then serves as a tool to demand present action.

Katherine of Aragon deploys history to the same ends in *Henry VIII*, her trial literalising the legalistic rhetoric that is traditionally associated with complaint. Like

[45] Thorne, 'Lawful let it be,' p. 107.
[46] Kerrigan, pp. 27-8.
[47] Thorne, 'Lawful let it be,' p. 106.

Constance and the Duchess of Gloucester, Katherine does not need to recite a full genealogy, emphasising instead her role as Henry's 'true and humble wife' (2.4.21). She briefly notes their respective fathers' kingly statuses (2.4.48-53), but her position as Henry's wife is her most relevant claim to power, one she highlights through recitation not of the lineal descent that made her a suitable bride, but of the skill with which she has discharged various uxorial expectations over the course of their marriage. She thus rewrites the shared past that Henry has called this trial to invalidate as one of collaboration and dutiful service that demands respect, calling upon the assembled lords to reject Henry's revision of their shared history in favour of her articulation of the nature of their past.

Such attempted rewriting of history recalls Rackin's influential concept of the 'anti-historian', her description of the role played by Shakespeare's female historical characters, who are inevitably 'opponents and subverters of the [male] historical and historiographic enterprise'.[48] This understanding of the female characters' historiographical position, echoed in *Engendering a Nation*, relies on the notion, discussed above, that genealogy is the fundamental purpose of the history play, 'a narrative of patriarchal succession designed to legitimate the social order […] An adulterous woman at any point can make a mockery of the entire story, and for that reason women are inevitably threatening to the historiographic enterprise'.[49] But as the scenes discussed thus far illustrate, female characters in fact deploy genealogies in the service of legitimacy: as a means of demonstrating their right to attempt to intervene in the creation of the play's history, and the disruptions through death that have prevented them from doing so. Constance and Katherine exemplify another goal: to supplement that which the historical record has elided or erased. Rackin acknowledges that part of a female character's potential threat is her 'appeals to the audience', and that 'as soon

[48] Rackin, 'Anti-Historians,' p. 329.
[49] Rackin, 'Anti-Historians,' pp. 336-7.

as Shakespeare attempts to incorporate those feminine forces […] historiography itself becomes problematic, no longer speaking with the clear, univocal voice of unquestioned tradition but re-presented as a dubious construct, always provisional'.[50] I argue that this is entirely the point. To position the audience as merely a potential source of dangerous misreading, liable to be lured into a false vision of history by the appeals of unruly female voices, overlooks the alliance the plays consistently seek to build between such voices and the audience itself—as well as the more mundane fact that, had Shakespeare been so confused and frustrated by the feminine perspective on history, he need not have included it at all. We, the viewers and readers, are urged not only to attend to and sympathise with the marginalised narrators of history, but to notice the parallels between their historical position and our own, to the point of collapsing the temporal distance between us, as described above.

However, for some female characters, the connection between their perspective and that of the audience does not derive from external knowledge. Rather, audience and character are united in having watched the same history unfold onstage. The history these women narrate is a version of one that we have seen enacted—and often, have seen them explicitly excluded from. Describing events we have actually witnessed, these female characters are not anti-historians, but uniquely empowered by their marginalisation to provide historical perspective on the events of their own plays.

As with curses, this form of historical power is inescapably tied to exclusion from political power. Female characters who retain their political or historical power—usually through their husbands—consistently fail to separate themselves from absorption into and suppression by the broader patriarchal historical narrative. Unlike the other women of *Richard III,* Lady Anne's curses lead her away from supernatural historical power, not towards it, though initially she seems to follow the required pattern. She 'authorises' her

[50] Rackin, 'Anti-Historians,' p. 330.

mourning, in Karreman's phrase,[51] in very explicit terms. Addressing the corpse of Henry VI, she asks:

> Be it lawful that I invocate thy ghost
> To hear the lamentations of poor Anne,
> Wife to thy Edward, to thy slaughtered son,
> Stabbed by the selfsame hand that made these wounds' (1.2.7-11)

Having established her connection to Henry and her right to mourn him due to her marriage to his son, she can launch into her mourning speech, and from there into her curse upon 'the hand that made these holes' (1.2.15). Anne's curse is as potent as those that Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York speak, but it is turned back upon herself: 'my woman's heart / Grossly grew captive to his honey words / And proved the subject of mine own soul's curse' (4.1.83-5). Her self-described capture by Richard, her absorption into the curse intended for him, undermines the intent of the curse and of her earlier mourning. Her narrative is reclaimed and redirected against her will, shifted from a protest against Richard's deeds into complicity with them. In the previously described Shakespeare's Globe production directed by Tim Carroll in 2012 and 2013, Anne embodied this helplessness as a silent presence in Richard's coronation scene, where she remained impassive and unmoving as she was bundled around the stage like a living doll, a prop more than a participant in the events. Though she was onstage at his side, she gave no reaction when Richard commanded Catesby to 'give out / That Anne my queen is sick and like to die' (4.2.59-60).

Though this is the first time Richard has spoken of wanting to dispose of Anne, it is not the first the audience has heard of it. In the scene immediately preceding the coronation, Anne displays a similar flash of political prophecy to that displayed by the Duchess of Gloucester and Blanche of Castile, predicting a decision that Richard does not appear to have made yet: 'he hates me for my father Warwick, / And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me'

[51] Karreman, *Drama of Memory*, p. 26.

(4.1.90-1). Her position recalls that of *King John*'s Blanche, who is also pressed into acceptance from a position of resistance and subsumed into her husband's narrative. The next and last we hear of Blanche after her surrender to the inevitability of the war, Lewis is renewing hostilities by claiming England in her name. She is not seen, only spoken of. Blanche's prayers against the war are redirected towards its continuation, just as Anne's absorption into Richard turns her own curses and prophesies against her. This highlights the contradictory position of female characters within Shakespeare's vision of history: historical privilege—the power to curse, to prophesy, or to see and tell history—is only accessible to them when they are in positions of least political influence. A clear-eyed perspective on history can only be achieved from the outside. Unlike Constance, Blanche fails to command onstage power, though in theory she is bolstered by much stronger connections to the centres of political influence with the King and Dowager Queen of England as her kin and the Dauphin and King of France as relatives by marriage. Anne is a still starker example, never more historically privileged but politically powerless than in her first and last scenes, when she is, respectively, a widow on the losing side of the recent war, and dead. As a widow, she is able to undertake the lament and cursing described above; as a ghost, she participates in enacting the Duchess of York's curses, dooming Richard to 'think on me / And fall thy edgeless sword' (5.3.172-3).

Blanche's and Anne's husbands are the sources of their displacement from both political and historical power. Blanche's vision of destruction and despair is transformed into a war in her name; Anne's curses and prophesies of Richard's doom and despair become the presages of her own death. In *Edward III,* Queen Philippa enters in the play's final scene only to have her attempt to inscribe her place in history overtaken by a similar absorption into her husband's narrative. Just as Lewis attacks England in Blanche's name, Philippa has been defending England in her husband's. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin have separately

discussed Philippa's role in the play: Howard sees her and her onstage pregnancy as emblematic of how *Edward III* 'foregrounds the women as the bearers of genealogical rights and vessels who carry legitimate children'.[52] Rackin notes that '*Edward III* is one of the only plays in which female military achievement is never condemned and never characterized as anomalous or inappropriate', arguing that rather, Philippa's martial valour and pregnancy are intimately linked as symbols of her enduring legacy.[53] Both Howard and Rackin emphasise the positive depictions of the Countess of Salisbury and Queen Philippa as contrasts to their conception of the dangerous, negative female characters of the first tetralogy and the contained female characters of the second. But Queen Philippa's attempt to add a narrative of her own achievements to the series of military conquests that the play displays is unsuccessful.

In Scene 10, Edward is told the 'happy tidings of success' against the Scottish forces, brought about by the 'painful travail of the Queen herself— / That, big with child, was every day in arms' (10.44). Eight scenes later, Philippa appears in order to demand that the soldier Copeland obey military custom and surrender the King of Scots, whom he captured, to Philippa herself. At the beginning of the scene, King Edward seems inclined to take her side against 'the proud, presumptuous squire of the north / That would not yield his prisoner to my Queen' (18.65-60). But after Copeland pleads his case, Edward changes his mind: 'This man doth please me and I like his words' (18.89). Copeland's words are, in essence, an argument that Philippa's attempt to stand in for Edward is invalid: 'Receive, dread lord, the custom of my fraught / The wealthy tribute of my labouring hands, / Which should long since have been surrendered up / Had but your gracious self been there in place'. When Philippa protests that Copeland 'didst scorn the King's command, / Neglecting our commission in his name,'

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[52] Howard, p. 5.
[53] Phyllis Rackin, 'Women's Roles in the Elizabethan History Plays,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays,* ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71-86, pp. 78-82.

Copeland doubles down on his assessment of her power: 'His name I reverence, but his person more; / His name shall keep me in allegiance still, / But to his person I will bend my knee' (18.86-7). Not only is Philippa's right to speak and act as regent undermined by Copeland and Edward, her actual actions in directing the battle that led to the King of Scots' capture are erased by Edward's acceptance of Copeland's reframing. Copeland implies that she is not due respect as a general in her own right, but only as the embodiment of her husband. And in rejecting her authority, Copeland and Edward reject her place in the narrative of the battle itself, crafting instead a purely masculine history in which the loyal knight Copeland directly served the absent Edward, who thereby gains the right to claim the victory and its spoils as his own. Philippa, as Edward commands her, 'let[s] displeasure pass' (18.88) and does not protest this revision of events. Philippa offers no reply to Edward's command, generating an open silence like those discussed in Chapter 2, an uncertain space that allows for the possibility that Philippa only grudgingly consents to Edward's ruling. But she does allow Edward and Copeland's rewriting of history to stand, meaning her deeds are subsumed into Edward's; her deeds, undertaken in his name, become literally his.

Such moments of erasure and exploitation of women's histories by their husbands seem to confirm the position that they are anti-historians whose inevitably threatening narratives must be suppressed by the authorised patriarchal perspective. That marriage is the most effective mechanism to achieve such suppression is a logical artistic reflection of a legal system that likewise subordinated women to their husbands, the legal principle of coverture literally rendering them an extension of their spouses in the eyes of the law. The Duchess of Gloucester, discussed above, appears to offer further confirmation of Rackin's argument that '[i]n the world of history, women are inevitably alien, representatives of the unarticulated

residue that eludes the men's historiographic texts and threatens their historical myths'[54] as her parting curses, quoted above, briefly expand into a kind of historical narration:

> Sometimes I'll say I am Duke Humphrey's wife
> And he a prince and ruler of the land;
> Yet so he ruled and such a prince he was
> As he stood by whilst I, his forlorn duchess,
> Was made a wonder and a pointing-stock
> To every idle rascal follower (2.4.43-8).

The heart of the history she plans to tell is of her own disgrace, but her husband plays an essential supporting role—one that requires not only describing his conduct at her public shaming, but the history of his time as Lord Protector and regent. Humphrey rejects this memorialisation, urging her to silence and quickly taking his leave (2.4.68). The potential danger of the Duchess's proposed narrative is plain: she threatens to re-write her husband's history as one of betrayal, his legacy as a leader undermined by his treatment of his wife in her moment of shame. But while Philippa, Blanche, and Anne's abortive histories do indeed feel like 'unarticulated residue', only able to separate themselves from their husbands' more powerful narratives in momentary glances, the Duchess's history is anything but 'alien'. By describing the literal scene in progress, her words are granted the authority of accuracy. We know the story she plans to tell is true because we are watching the history she describes happen. Though it may threaten Gloucester's sense of his own identity and legacy, her narrative is inescapably part of the play's own history.

The Duchess falls into a middle ground between the married female characters who are subsumed into their husbands' histories and the cursing women who are empowered by loss: her husband is alive, but she is permanently separated from him. Other female characters are also empowered by separation from their partners, through death or otherwise, to propagate a historical narrative that we have seen enacted within the play itself—and that

[54] Rackin, 'Anti-Historians,' p. 343.

we have also seen them forced out of. Like the Duchess of Gloucester's ability to describe her own actions as if from the outside, these characters' ability to narrate what they have not seen positions them beyond the linear stream of the play's plot, exchanging the marginalisation that their husbands imposed upon them for historical power gained upon their husbands' deaths. Their exclusion from the historical narrative draws attention to the divide between history as enacted and history as recorded, and the ways theatre is particularly equipped to highlight this gap.

One of the clearest examples is the Queen in *Richard II,* whose essential marginal perspective was discussed in the previous chapter. In her final scene in the play, Jennifer C. Vaught writes, the Queen 'contributes to the afterlife of Richard's "lamentable tale" by promising to retell it during her exile in a French cloister and memorializing him through her tears'—a relationship 'that challenges the notion that women are necessarily anxiety-provoking, debilitating, or contaminating for men in Renaissance literary works'.[55] More specifically, it challenges the notion that historical narratives in the mouths of female characters are always destabilising and threatening to patriarchal history as told by male characters. Unlike Gloucester's rejection of his wife's re-writing of his past, Richard actively urges his wife to narrate his history to others, in language that distinctly evokes the 'sad stories of the death of kings' that he himself longs to tell earlier in the play (3.2.156). The Queen is specifically chosen as the vessel for propagating his legacy. Vaught describes her as 'one of the few women in Shakespeare's plays entrusted with the task of memorializing another through narrative',[56] an intriguing distinction from the memorialisation through cursing and lament described above. The female characters of this chapter indicate that there are many women who are positioned as bearers of the memories of another, usually a male

[55] Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 89.
[56] Vaught, p. 99.

family member. But Vaught highlights two elements that differentiate the Queen from women like Elizabeth, Constance, and the Duchess of York. First, she is 'entrusted with the task' of propagating her husband's memory by Richard himself, a status that does indeed render her unique amongst Shakespeare's female historical characters. No other women are explicitly and openly directed to memorialise their partners. The Queen's proposed memorialisation also takes a subtly different form than those of the women above—what Vaught describes as 'through narration'—and lacks their supernatural and prophetic abilities.

The mourning style of the other female characters of this chapter necessarily centres the individual experience of the speaker, as her grief for the absent family member is rendered as important as the family member himself. This is in part what makes extensive scenes of mourning seem so readily dismissible: in centring a personal experience of grief as a form of historical narrative, they force reconsideration of what is thought proper content for history. Narrative and dynastic clarity, as the repetitions of first names and highly emotive language discussed above suggest, is not necessarily the point. We do not know the nature of the story the Queen will tell, but Richard frames it as a history in which the Queen herself exists only as narrator:

> In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
> With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
> Of woeful ages long ago betid;
> And ere thou bid good night, to quit their griefs
> Tell thou the lamentable tale of me,
> And send the hearers weeping to their beds (5.1.40-5).

Though we never hear her 'lamentable tale', one might wonder what exactly the Queen would say about her husband's reign: her only other speaking scenes enact her exclusion from power and even knowledge of politics. When the Queen speaks to Bushy in Act 2 about her premonition of impending doom at Richard's departure for Ireland, she lacks the clarity of the prophetesses discussed above; rather, the passage 'insistently den[ies] the possibility to

know the future'.[57] Under the dramaturgical framework discussed in this chapter so far, the Queen lacks clarity because she has not yet fully experienced or articulated her losses. However, like Blanche—and unlike Bushy, who is unwilling to acknowledge her fears—she is allowed a glimpse of the dispossession yet to come because her separation from power has, as the scene itself demonstrates, already begun. 'Now hath my soul brought forth her prodigy' (2.2.67) the Queen declares when she finally learns the specific form of her prophetic foreboding, Bushy's dismissive speech instantly undermined by the realisation of the Queen's fears. As discussed in Chapter 2, her next scene dramatises her resulting marginalisation; her final appearance onstage is to be named the bearer of Richard's memory. Despite knowing so little of the events surrounding Richard's fall that she is the last to learn he has been deposed, she is the person he calls upon to tell that story to others, suggesting once more that there is in fact an essential link between exclusion and the ability to narrate history.

Like the Queen, the majority of Lady Percy's stage time in *1 Henry IV* is devoted to her exclusion from political power, and her husband's active refusal, discussed in Chapter 2, to allow her access to the information that would grant her a role in his rebellion. At the beginning of *2 Henry IV,* however, it is she who becomes the voice of Hotspur's legacy in explicit contrast to his own father. Her differentiation from both Lord and Lady Northumberland—the former accused by Lady Percy of abandoning his son's legacy, the latter easily giving up the fight to make her husband remember it (2.3.5-6)—emphasises that blood ties are not the source of historical privilege. L. J. Simmons proposes that '[t]hroughout the Henriad, the Mortimers [including Kate] signify female disruption and the corresponding failure of the male to control the coherence of historical narrative; this historical threat is

[57] Lammers, p. 73.

simultaneously registered in the anxious constructions of male sexuality'.[58] However, like Richard II's Queen, Lady Percy's role is ultimately to construct, not disrupt, the historical narrative. The uncertain state of her marital relations with her husband—it is made fairly explicit that they are not sexually intimate at the beginning of *1 Henry IV*, despite the critical preoccupation with the 'sexiness' of their first scene[59]—does not seem to impact her ability to uphold his legacy in narrative form, though not in the form of an actual heir. She is not a threat to Hotspur, she is the source of his historical survival.

Lady Percy's ultimate exclusion is a telling point of diversion from the marriage that most obviously and directly echoes hers and Hotspur's: the relationship between Brutus and Portia in *Julius Caesar.* Anna Kamaralli argues that Lady Percy's pleas are Portia's scenes rehearsed in a lower key: 'The high classical tragedy of a Portia and Brutus has to be bawdy comedy for a Kate and a Harry'. However, she notes, 'it would do the scene […] a great disservice not to see the serious urgency behind Kate's words'.[60] But although the two scenes are marked by distinct structural and linguistic echoes, their outcomes and the characters' subsequent roles diverge sharply. This appears to be a stark example of Janette Dillon's 'scenic units', discussed in Chapter 2. Brutus agrees to let Portia in on his plans, and her next and final scene is an anxious exchange with Brutus's servant, as she tries to ask him to bring news from the Capitol without revealing why she wants to know (2.4). Hotspur refuses to tell Kate anything, allowing her instead to follow him wherever he is going, but forbidding her to ask more questions (2.3). Lady Percy's next and final appearance in *1 Henry IV* is the result of that journey, a scene in which her marriage is set alongside that of the Mortimers, though critics differ on whether this contrast is meant to illustrate the relative harmony or discord of

[58] L. J. Simmons, 'Masculine Negotiations in Shakespeare's History Plays: Hal, Hotspur, and "the Foolish Mortimer,"' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44 (1993), 440-463, p. 444.
[59] Anna Kamaralli, *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2012), p. 42.
[60] Kamaralli, p. 42.

the Percys.[61] But though often framed in critical discussions as a domestic anomaly, this scene of paired couples is bookended by political negotiations; generally overlooked is the fact that the women are admitted into the room only in the interim between martial preparations. Just as Lady Mortimer's song will '[make] such difference 'twixt wake and sleep / As is the difference betwixt day and night' (3.1.225-6), it also fills up the space between political actions: by the time she is done singing, Mortimer points out, 'will our book, I think, be drawn' (3.1.330).

Chapter 2 critiqued the utility of stark divisions between public and private when analysing these plays, but that is not to say that female characters are never separated from politics. In this instance, the male characters deliberately sequester their wives into a space where explicit talk of politics is not permitted to intrude. Even Lady Mortimer's direct reference to the upcoming conflict, her tearful pleas that 'She'll be a soldier too, she'll to the wars' (3.1.201), is mere rhetoric, as in the end her only actual request is to sing Mortimer to sleep. The scene is a continuation and duplication of Hotspur's efforts in his first scene with his wife: to keep the women from knowledge of the rebels' plans. Their scene in Wales is therefore not domestic for its own sake, or because there are female characters present in it, but because Hotspur, Mortimer, and Glendower have intentionally made it so. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is a choice that reflects on the rebels' cause. Their effort to render the space into which their wives are permitted apolitical is a political action—especially given that both Mortimer and Hotspur derive some of their political legitimacy from their marriages.

In contrast, Portia reminds Brutus that she is 'Cato's daughter' (2.1.318), and that comment seems to tip the scales for Brutus and force him to agree that she has a right to information. We next see her acting on the knowledge she has been promised. Though she cannot go in person to the Capitol, or participate directly in the assassination of Caesar,

[61] Ibid.

Shakespeare makes explicit that she has indeed received the political knowledge that Lady Percy is just as explicitly excluded from. The next we hear of Portia, she is dead. The next time we see Lady Percy, she is called upon to deliver an accounting of the cause she was never fully admitted to. And yet, her separation from the actual political events is essential. It is the point where Lady Percy and Portia's parallel paths diverge: Portia, admitted into political power by her husband, cannot then narrate what she has learned as a historian. Lady Percy, continually separated, can tell her husband's story with a clarity his own father and mother lack. Her position as an outsider renders her privy to a scope of vision characters more fully immersed in history cannot access.

For the Queen and Lady Percy, this separation from both political power and an attendant place in history is reflected both within the narrative and extra-textually. They both exist in the blurred space between history and fiction discussed in Chapter 2: though critics and editors assign the Queen her documented first name and Lady Percy her real lineage, there is no real textual indication of these historical identities. Their multiple layers of separation from the ordinary course of history—their small roles, their marginalisation within the story, their troubling of the boundaries between truth and fiction—combined with their unique and specific identities as historians suggest an intimate relationship between all of these traits, suggesting once again the theatrical privilege Lin associates with the *platea* and those who are able to step outside of the narrative and into an active manipulation of the materials of the theatre. Karreman proposes that 'scenes of remembering and forgetting often double as moments in which the theatre reflects on its own function for the process through which cultural memory is made'.[62] Wilder specifically associates these processes with 'women and other outsiders from history […] Constructing a past from theatrical materials, such figures align themselves with the social and professional world of the theatre as much

[62] Karreman, *Drama of Memory,* p. 71.

as, if not more than, with the fictional world of the plays in which they take shape'.[63] The connection between female characters, historical narration, and the theatre itself is most clearly seen in these characters at the margins of the drama, for their potential fictionality, paired with their impossible knowledge of unseen events, is a reminder of their fundamental theatricality.

In Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy, it is history itself that shapes the narrative because each play depicts events that have both already happened and already been written. It is also history itself—patriarchal history, chronicle history—that forces these women's potential contributions into marginal spaces where they must largely be discovered imaginatively. Thus there is a kind of logic in this border-blurring historical role being assigned to the most insistently theatrical figures onstage: female characters played by boys. Though scholars such as Stephen Orgel and Farah Karim-Cooper have noted that the overlap between boys and women in terms of early modern beauty standards suggests that, at least in terms of beauty and even eroticism, a kind of authentic feminine presence was achievable on the early modern English stage, I agree with Michael Shapiro that audiences 'probably maintained a dual consciousness of both actors and characters and hence perceived both female characters and female impersonators' when watching plays.[64] The embodied reminders of the limitations of theatrical representation of actual people or events, female characters are always in the mimetic borderland that their history-telling likewise inhabits. Associated once more with the *platea,* in but not entirely *of* the historical world of the play, these characters demonstrate Shakespeare's awareness of the distance between the events of the play and the broader historical narrative in which they are contained—and, in turn, between that narrative and unrecoverable actual events. This kind of separation between

[63] Wilder, p. 19.
[64] Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 2.

history and story can only exist in the theatre, not only because of its ability to associate the marginalised female characters with the audience's position as fellow spectators and potential disseminators of history, but due to the play's status as an adaptation of a pre-existing historical narrative that it can both reflect and comment upon. As Felicity Dunworth writes, the adaptation of chronicle narratives for the theatre 'allows for a representation of chronicle history in which the stories themselves, and the way they are told, can be tested against other discourses and other perspectives'—and female characters in particular serve as a conduit for these alternate perspectives.[65] There is no place for the direct oppositions of history and anti-history in this multidirectional historiography.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the shifting landscape of Shakespeare's history plays fully accounts for the possibility that audiences will read the scenes' events on their own biased terms, and may seek out sympathy in unexpected places. The various versions of history that stem both from the characters' own interpretations of events and the audience's varied readings of them must be seen to move together, complementary and contradictory by turns, but not in active opposition. It may seem like quibbling to reject the term 'anti-historian' for implying such an oppositional duality, but I argue that it is essential to consider these female figures and their presence in the history plays not as forces set against the historiographical hegemony, but rather as collaborative participants in creating a multi-vocal sense of history. This multi-vocality is what allows for the testing that Dunworth describes, as characters assert and present different understandings of the history they are enacting both as event and as drama. The historical-fictional blurring that Lady Percy and the Queen represent puts pressure on both of these angles, providing an alternate narrative of the events that the play itself has presented. The narrative they provide is founded on their position as apparently inessential bystanders, and questions what theatre might offer that history cannot.

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[65] Dunworth, p. 81.

The genre of history

I have returned throughout this thesis to the idea that female characters and the places where their supposedly domestic, excessively fictional contributions intrude most insistently on the plot of Shakespeare's history plays are often seen by modern critics as digressive or disfiguring to the plays' structures. As J. L. Simmons describes it, 'the plays represent history as a masculine discourse that is subject to female interference or generic mutilation'. This 'mutilation' might take the form of extraneous and excessive diversions into mourning, as described above; or, it might mean a swerve into humour: 'As women translate men into fools, they transform history into comedy, with its attendant dangers of subversive indecorum'.[66] As Chapter 1 demonstrated, in the early modern period, such generic shifts were not universally considered as disruptive or inappropriate as Simmons suggests. But just as the historical comedies provide a model for a historical storytelling that accounts for women in a way Shakespeare's histories generally do not, tonal shifts like those highlighted by Simmons point to moments where the plays grapple with the possibility of female participation in history in terms that are otherwise unfamiliar to Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy. In such scenes, female characters' attempts to change the course of history result in changing the genre of that history's presentation. Unlike in historical comedies, these shifts are ultimately temporary, emphasising a specifically Shakespearean sense of the limited capacity of history as a genre. These moments highlight once more the role of history itself as something like a providential agent in Shakespeare's historiography: the implacable force that both drives the drama and limits its scope.

[66] Simmons, p. 445.

Chapter 1 discussed the porous boundaries between history and fiction in this period, and highlighted the ways in which early modern writers seem to have recognised far more readily than present-day critics that all history plays are fundamentally fictional. Given this generic flexibility, the question explored in Chapter 2 and above of whether or not Richard's wife should or should not be called Isabella may seem irrelevant: she both is and is not her historical counterpart, and few in the period would have particularly cared. But Shakespeare's works consistently suggest a more rigid sense of the boundary between history and fiction than that expressed in the historical comedies—a genre whose structures he drew upon only twice, and neither in a straightforward manner. Richard Dutton points out the emphasis on comedy on the title pages of both the *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V,* while Jean Howard highlights the structural similarities between Hal and Falstaff's relationship in the *Henry IV* plays and the journey of a prince in a traditional historical comedy.[67] And while King Edward III's courtship of the Countess of Salisbury is framed along traditional historical comedy lines, she is distinctly different from the entirely fictional commoners who usually fill the role of the ruler's object of desire. She, like Lady Percy and the Queen, is plausibly factual—indeed, Shakespeare makes her more factual than his sources do, by replacing source author William Painter's ahistorical concluding marriage between Edward and the Countess with the more accurate threat of adultery and final return to their proper marital partners.[68]

Though I have discussed throughout this thesis the ways in which Shakespeare's historical vision is more capacious than criticism often reflects, on the whole, his history plays resist the kind of large-scale generic blurriness we see in the historical comedies, particularly when it comes to maintaining the division between (largely tragic) historical

[67] Richard Dutton, ''Methinks the Truth Should Live from Age to Age': The Dating and Contexts of Henry V,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68 (2005), 173–204, pp. 173-4.; Howard, p. 11.
[68] Giorgio Melchiori, 'Introduction' in *Edward III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 36-7.

figures and (often comic) fictional ones. Even Shakespeare's most famous historical clown, Falstaff, is rooted in something like recorded fact, a connection that Shakespeare reinforced when he was forced to change the character's original name, John Oldcastle—a religious martyr with whom King Henry IV was supposedly associated—and replaced it with that of another actual person, John Falstaff, whom Shakespeare had already briefly depicted as a cowardly and dishonourable knight in *1 Henry VI,* where his name is often rendered 'Fastolf' by modern editors. Lammers reads the interlude with the Countess of Auvergne in that same play as an explicit and intentional expression of the contrast between Shakespeare's historical style and that of his contemporaries, arguing that 'the scene is indeed an "intrusion," but one that functions to reject the mode it cites. […] More specifically, what is renounced as old-fashioned in the scene is the tradition of the so-called "romance" histories'.[69]

Unlike contemporary playwright and fellow prolific historical dramatist Thomas Heywood's historical style, for whom '[t]he boundaries between fact and fiction are wide open; and the principles of narrative relevance and coherence operate […] with a gothic freedom',[70] Shakespeare erects a border, though this border is still more porous and permissive than present-day standards recognise. This suggests, to return to the question posed in Chapter 1, that however mutable the history play genre at the time, and however unclear its definition now, Shakespeare himself understood there to be some form of generic boundary.

But though Lammers relates the scene with the Countess of Auvergne to '[t]he comic "keening contest" between Aumerle and the Duchess and Duke of York'[71] in *Richard II,* which I will discuss below, his reading of the Countess scene as a specific and deliberate attempt to mark out Shakespeare's new historical cycle in contrast to his theatrical rivals (for

[69] Lammers, pp. 37-8.
[70] Dutton, p. 176
[71] Lammers, p. 37.

he also argues that *1 Henry VI* was the first of the tetralogy to be written) cannot account for the way such moments recur across Shakespeare's history plays. While these scenes are, to a certain extent, 'the rejection of romance as a mode for the presentation of history', they are also expressions of the difference in female representation in the romantic history genre as opposed to the more tragic historical forms that Shakespeare prefers. The marginalisation that female characters undergo in such scenes is therefore simultaneously historiographical and dramaturgical: they are reaching the boundaries not of history itself, but of history as a dramatic and literary form. Lammers points out that this is not entirely a question of relative fictionality, but mostly of gender and tone, for in *1 Henry VI,* the fictional Countess of Auvergne scene is immediately followed by the equally fictional exchange of red and white roses in Temple Garden.[72] When female characters seek to assert their presence and bend events to their will by warping the genre of the scene they are in, they raise the momentary potential that the play itself will shift away from tragically-inflected patriarchal history into a genre more capable of containing their fully-realised voices.

Critics often treat the mourning and curses discussed in this chapter so far as examples of such generic warping, inappropriate emotional incursions into the plays' political matter. However, Dermot Cavanagh argues that 'a tragic understanding of the past is common with Shakespeare […] and is often expressed through sorrowful memory, as figures such as Constance in *King John,* Richard II and Lady Percy in *2 Henry IV* demonstrate. Each of these figures is distinctive and open to multivalent understanding, but their presence […] allows us to note how often the historical action of the plays is arrested and then subjected to tragic reflection through acts of recollection and lament'.[73] While this chapter has already disputed the sense that such scenes 'arrest' the plays' actions, Cavanagh highlights the extent

[72] Lammers, p. 41.
[73] Cavanagh, p. 39.

to which a tragic framework—one that naturally allows for mourning as means of reflecting on history—is deeply embedded in the plays. The oft-discussed fact that almost all of the plays grouped as 'Histories' in the 1623 Folio were advertised as tragedies when published in quarto reaffirms this connection, and reinforces the idea that mourning itself is an integral element of Shakespeare's vision of history.

Across the plays, however, there are scenes that shift the drama into another key. Margaret's farewell to Suffolk in *2 Henry VI* is a case in point: as they lament his imminent departure together, the scene shifts from an impromptu murder trial and political exile into a romantic register. The sudden confirmation that their hitherto implied romance is indeed real realigns the terms of their conversation and its implications. Suddenly, they are not political co-conspirators, but star-crossed lovers:

> So, get thee gone, that I may know my grief;
> 'Tis but surmised whiles thou art standing by,
> As one that surfeits thinking on a want.
> I will repeal thee, or, be well assured,
> Adventure to be banishèd myself;
> And banishèd I am, if but from thee.
> Go, speak not to me. Even now be gone!
> O, go not yet! Even thus two friends condemned
> Embrace and kiss and take ten thousand leaves,
> Loather a hundred times to part than die.
> Yet now farewell, and farewell life with thee. (3.2.359-68)

The language distinctly recalls that of *Romeo and Juliet,* which was likely written within a few years of *2 Henry VI*. Rather than scheming politicians who have just successfully planned a murder, this language asks us to instead to view the couple sympathetically—to imagine, momentarily, a genre in which they would be the heroes, either as victims of a tragic separation or destined for an unlikely happy reunion. Their exchange seems to exist in the alternate history that Margaret imagines in her first scene alone with Suffolk, when she confesses that she 'thought King Henry had resembled thee' (1.3.54).

It is a similar shift to that seen at the end of *Henry V,* in the courtship scene between Henry and Catherine. The tension between Catherine's distinct sense of coercion and the ease with which the scene is rendered charming and comic in performance, discussed in Chapter 2, makes its intentions difficult to discern. As Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost argue, Catherine's resistance undermines 'the assumption that defeat and conquest can be papered over with sweet words and an attempt to change genres'.[74] Mudan Finn and Frost remind us that, no matter how well-performed the sense of true romance between Catherine and Henry, the scene's attempted generic shift must be unsuccessful; even without the undercurrent of Catherine's resistance, Henry's image of a romantic comedy capped with a son is immediately contradicted by the final Chorus's reminder of that son's unhappy history. Similarly, Margaret's reframing of her and Suffolk's conversation—for it is she who dictates the terms of their exchange throughout the scene—fails to permanently reframe the story in their favour. Mudan Finn sees a mirror image of such a failure in Edward IV's courtship of Elizabeth Grey, when 'Elizabeth resists Edward's efforts to fit her into a known narrative—that of the lusty widow able and willing to become the mistress of a notoriously lusty king'.[75] But though Elizabeth may resist being narrativised as Edward's mistress, she cannot fully redirect the genre, and instead becomes his wife. All three scenes not only imagine but depict an alternate world, an alternate genre, but one that cannot endure beyond the boundaries of that single scene.

As we have seen, Lammers highlights the generic shift that takes place near the end of *Richard II,* when the Duke and Duchess of York and their son Aumerle race to present themselves before King Henry IV to plead against (in York's case) and for Aumerle's pardon for an intended but unfulfilled act of treason (5.3). It is an event King Henry himself

[74] Finn and Frost, p. 242.
[75] Finn, p. 161.

explicitly identifies as a genre shift: 'Our scene is altered from a serious thing / And now changed to "The Beggar and the King"' (5.3.79-80). Molly Smith points out that 'the Duchess of York's part in [Aumerle's] pardon is an entirely Shakespearean invention',[76] which only strengthens the impression that she is the catalyst for the generic shifts that accompany her appearance in the play. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin note in their edition of the play that 'only the title ["The Beggar and the King"] is pertinent to the present situation', not the content of the ballad it references,[77] but the title alone clearly suggests the Duchess's aims: to shift York's narrative of the loyal father and the treasonous son into a genre where humble intercession leads to royal grace. And in a certain sense, she succeeds: Aumerle is pardoned, and his part in the play ends with the Duchess's prayer that God will 'make thee new' (5.3.153).

However, as Smith notes, Aumerle has been promised a pardon before the Duchess arrives; the 'vital exchange' of the scene is that between Henry and Aumerle, which 'redefines the monarchy as a contractual agreement between king and subjects'.[78] Instead of the kind of benevolent kingly mercy that the Duchess imagines, Henry has made a pragmatic move: 'To win thy after-love I pardon thee' (5.3.34). For some critics, this is an aspect of the scene's comedy: the York parents' pleas are, unbeknownst to them, appealing a foregone conclusion.[79] But the closing lines ask not that we dismiss the scene as a comic and ultimately unnecessary interlude, but instead grant it, and the Duchess of York in particular, some parting gravity:

> KING HENRY: Uncle, farewell, —and cousin, adieu.
> Your mother hath well prayed, and prove you true.
> DUCHESS: Come, my old son. I pray God make thee new (5.3.151-3).

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[76] Smith, p. 286.
[77] Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, eds., *Richard II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 269 n.79.
[78] Smith, p. 287.
[79] Peter Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage: Power and Succession in the History Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 260.

Henry thus shifts the decision away from himself, relocating it in the Duchess's intercession and framing the scene itself as a triumph of her efforts. While modern productions now often attempt to bring Aumerle's debt of loyalty to Henry to an apparently logical conclusion by having Aumerle take up the role of Richard's murderer, the text itself actively resists any such reading. Shakespeare ushers both Aumerle and his mother out of the story with her prayer for his redemption. If she has indeed partly succeeded in shifting the narrative into the shape she desires, she has done so by pulling herself and her son into a genre the play can no longer contain.

All of these characters' shifts into comedy and romance are shifts into genres that are distinctly more empowering for female characters than tragic histories tend to be, as the historical comedies themselves reflect. But just as Shakespeare stops short of historical comedy, his histories stop short of a form that can fully contain these alternate visions, necessitating temporary shifts into genres more hospitable to the characters' needs. These detours into other genres are not only or always comic: Smith notes that the Duchess of Gloucester's opening scene of trying to rally her brother-in-law Gaunt to action against King Richard is essentially a 'request for a revenge play'.[80] *Richard II* does not become one, but such a play would have the means to more directly satisfy her desire for justice for her murdered husband than Gaunt is willing or able to offer her. Talbot's interaction with the Countess of Auvergne is echoed by Margaret's dialogue with Suffolk at the end of that play, another exchange that briefly suggests the play might veer into romance. Lady Mortimer's single appearance in *1 Henry IV* and Catherine's conversation with her maid Alice in *Henry V* both literally introduce a different language for participating in history, a glimpse of a world beyond England that the English stage cannot sustain.

[80] Smith, p. 287.

While all of these moments fail to permanently transform the play in which they are contained, this failure draws attention to the history play's limitations, and to the stories, languages, agendas, and potential endings it must exclude. David Scott Kastan describes how criticism of *1 Henry IV* 'has delighted in demonstrating the play's aesthetic unity by showing how the comic plot "serves" the historical plot […] The formal coherence that critics have demanded from the play can be achieved only by subordinating subplot to main plot, commoners to aristocrats, comedy to history'.[81] Such subordination explains, in part, why critics have not generally demonstrated an equal enthusiasm for proving how these apparently extraneous female characters are equally essential to the plot. Their brief incursions are more difficult to integrate into a unified vision of a given history play's purpose as centred around the supremacy of its dominant political plot. As Kastan suggests of *1 Henry IV,* such tonal variety is a play's means of 'register[ing] its unreconciled social disjunctions generically'. The plays' very structures are designed to reflect their inability to fully contain all of the stories they brush against: '[h]istory is displayed as something other—something more extensive, however less stable—than merely the history of what Renaissance historians characteristically called "matters of state."'[82] But the only thing these scenes truly destabilise is the contemporary reader's understanding of a history play.

The characters, scenes, and moments discussed in this chapter are essential, recurring elements of Shakespeare's attempts to contain England's history on the stage, constituting rather than troubling the plays' form. The irresistible pressure of history forges the shape of the plays themselves—and history itself is both process and genre, confined by what has already happened, how it has been recorded, and how Shakespeare defines or understands the

[81] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 132.
[82] Kastan, pp. 132-3.

limits of its onstage presentation. Women sit at the core of the plays' expressions of this tension between source and drama by articulating alternate styles and narratives for the histories the plays themselves are enacting. The divide between historical *locus* and *platea,* between those who can enact history and those who can see and narrate it, is inescapably gendered in Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy.

CHAPTER FOUR | Blurring the Boundaries: Effeminacy and Feminine History

In proposing a gendered tension at the heart of Shakespeare's history plays, I join a substantial body of similar thinking. From the often-discussed and practically proverbial distinction between the effeminate French and Spanish and the hearty English, to the gendered undertones of Bolingbroke's overthrow of Richard II and Prince Hal's rejection of Falstaff, critics have long understood that gender is fundamental to the history plays, if not necessarily in the form of female characters. Essential to the history of this argument is not only a binary divide between men and women, but a blurrier relationship between masculinity and femininity onto which competing visions of rulership and Englishness are mapped. This awareness of gendered pressures is reflected even in discourses of the time, most famously Thomas Nashe's suggestion that a history play could act as 'reproof to these degenerate effeminate days'.[1] On the other hand, as Rebecca Ann Bach points out, even though 'Shakespeare's history plays display and reproduce dominant ideologies [of gender][…] Shakespeare himself is clearly well aware that this reproduction sits uneasily with the theatre's inherent effeminacy'.[2]

Katherine Eggert builds on this tension to read the history plays' contest between masculinity and femininity as a specifically theatrical one, 'between who is fit to rule and who can most compellingly hold the stage'—qualities that are not necessarily tied to characters' stated gender, but are associated in Eggert's reading with masculinity and femininity respectively.[3] As discussed in Chapter 1, Ralf Hertel reads this gendering of historical rulership as stemming from the apparent contradictions of the Elizabethan era in particular, and the need to 'contain' the destabilising possibilities of Queen Elizabeth's

[1] Nashe, p. 1010.
[2] Bach, p. 235.
[3] Eggert, p. 79.

reign.[4] Graham Holderness agrees that history plays were dedicated to such containment, seeking to construct a vision of England and the English past that 'trace[s] a historical line in which supreme power remains unassailably masculine, from the perspective of a familiarity with female rule and some measure of female power', and that '[t]he function of historical instruction and historical example is conceived as the inculcation in young men, by precedent patriarchal example, of strength, virtue, and heroic resolve'.[5] Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin's extremely influential reading of Shakespeare's history plays as a progression of increasing containment of the feminine continues to underpin readings of the plays and is cited in all of the arguments I have quoted thus far.

Howard and Rackin locate the conflict between masculine and feminine not as a means of undermining Elizabeth's reign, but in service of the patriarchal historiography required to uphold the dubiously-derived Tudor rule.[6] Jacqueline Vanhoutte argues that the first tetralogy and *King John* in particular 'never construe national threats independently of issues of gender […] These plays generalise on arguments first made against Mary and Elizabeth Tudor in two ways: by applying them to all women and by applying them to all monarchs'.[7] Bach argues that the plays' natural preoccupation with the question of rulership is precisely why they cannot be extricated from questions of gender: 'As Shakespeare's history plays contemplate who should be king and how kings should rule, they ask what kind of a man a king should be; they ask how kings and nobles should be related to women and womanliness'.[8] Analysing the presence, in Bach's terms, not just of women, but of womanliness—or what is more commonly referred to in criticism as effeminacy—is and has

[4] Hertel, p. 194.
[5] Holderness, pp. 40, 56.
[6] Howard and Rackin, p. 161.
[7] Vanhoutte, p. 137.
[8] Bach, p. 220.

been considered essential to fully understanding how gender operates in the structure of Shakespeare's history plays.

Discussions of effeminacy in both tetralogies have focused in large part on the military ineptitude and personal sensitivity of King Henry VI and King Richard II, with Falstaff also discussed as a grotesquely feminised body. But twenty-first century definitions of effeminacy do not always match what the early modern period would have considered a transgression of gendered norms. The word 'effeminate' itself is a case in point, most frequently used in the sixteenth century to describe a man who was overly preoccupied with sex and women. This is presumably the usage intended by King Henry IV when he describes his son as a 'young wanton and effeminate boy' at the end of *Richard II* (5.3.10). While current associations with masculinity and virility suggest the word has completely reversed its original meaning, the early modern period's expectations of proper masculine behaviour in fact reveal otherwise. As Alexandra Shepard writes, men in the early modern period were accused of effeminacy when they engaged in 'excessive or unchecked behaviour that diverted them from their rational purpose. Conduct writers […] equated manhood with reason, temperance, and self-control and labelled deviation from these virtues in antithetical terms of unmanliness, beastliness, or effeminacy'.[9] Within this framework, the use of 'effeminate' to describe an excessively lustful man seems not like an outlier, but a logical aspect of the period's understanding of women as incapable of controlling their impulses and desires. By early modern standards, Henry VI, with his excessive pity and emotional vulnerability, is just as effeminate as the virile Edward IV and his proclivity for 'caper[ing] nimbly in a lady's

[9] Shepard, pp. 29-30. Shepard and others argue that this ideal represented one of many, sometimes competing, visions of masculinity in the early modern period, with young men and lower-class men in particular laying claim to 'effeminate' behaviour such as excessive public drunkenness or violence as a form of manhood (see Shepard and Gates, for example). However, as this chapter shall demonstrate, Shakespeare's structural subordination of these alternate forms of masculinity and, in some cases, specific descriptions of them as failures of manhood, suggest that it is accurate, for our purposes, to define ideal manhood in the terms quoted here. This distinction highlights the importance, discussed in Chapter 2, of separating theatrical characters from actual social practice.

chamber' (*R3* 1.1.12), though in our current culture these behaviours exist at opposite ends of a binary gender spectrum.

Though critics including Alan Sinfield have been careful to delineate the difference, there is still a distinct critical tendency to replicate our present association of effeminacy with homosexuality, meaning that characters more amenable to queer readings, like Richard II or even Falstaff, are frequently discussed in terms of effeminacy, but characters who resist such readings are overlooked. [10] To the extent that sodomy might have been seen as an outlet for a man's effeminately voracious sexual appetite, or that excessive preference shown to a favourite was indicative of a general lack of self-restraint, the association is logical. But in general, this pattern in criticism has led to the impression of a false equivalency between early modern and current connotations of the word 'effeminate', both in relation to sexuality and in general. Emphasising the differences between sixteenth- and twenty-first-century gendered expectations is essential to locating the presence of effeminacy in the history plays, and to thereby uncover its role in Shakespeare's gendered historical dramaturgy.

Both Jean E. Howard and Jennifer C. Vaught have considered tears as a sign of effeminacy in history plays through readings that highlight the complexity of such gendered signifiers in the early modern period. Both suggest the use of tears as a double-edged indicator: as Howard writes, '[t]here were many early modern discourses […] in which weeping was considered salutary, both for men and for women. For example, the inability to weep could be a sign of humoral imbalance'. [11] Vaught argues that in Shakespeare's plays, 'those men who ally themselves with women by adopting conventionally feminine forms of expression such as weeping and wailing are often strengthened rather than weakened as a

[10] Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[11] Jean E. Howard, 'Monarchs Who Cry: The Gendered Politics of Weeping in the English History Play' in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* ed. by Dympna Callaghan (Malden: Blackwell, 2016), 457-466, p. 460.

result'.[12] Vaught's reading highlights the potential for male characters to engage in the rhetorical and dramaturgical strategies associated with women discussed thus far. By doing so, a male character might gain the power of 'conventionally feminine forms of expression', but thereby risks being rendered effeminate. I will call this state of being structural effeminacy to emphasise, as Vaught does, that it is a question of form rather than of content: such male characters draw upon female forms of expression, but may not otherwise conduct themselves in an effeminate manner. For this reason, it is more useful to consider the types of speech and structural positions discussed in the last chapter not as female, but as feminine.

In accessing this feminine speech, male characters enter the likewise feminine dramaturgical space characterised by marginalisation that the previous chapters have illustrated. Andrew M. Kirk argues that a ruler's effeminacy renders him ineffective on multiple levels, as '[m]en with qualities conventionally ascribed to women are shown to be incapable of ruling or defending their country, incapable of controlling the forces of history'.[13] Kirk's argument reflects both the political and historical dimensions of their failings: they lose control not only of their country, but of their place in history itself. Structural effeminacy expands beyond kings, offering male characters across the history plays access to the kinds of historical insight—expressed through curses, prophecies, and genealogies—that the previous chapter defined as feminine. But these men are bound by the same structural requirements for doing so as female characters: marginalisation from political and structural power.

Prophesy may be the form of feminised speech to which male characters have the readiest access: across the histories, male characters step aside to deliver anxious and ominous prophesies, often at the end of a scene. However, unlike the confident curses of

[12] Vaught, p. 2.
[13] Kirk, p. 110.

Margaret, these glimpses of the future consistently serve to reinforce the speaker's lack of power to influence the events he foresees, as when the dying Gaunt, 'a prophet new-inspired', foresees the degradation of England, which '[h]ath made a shameful conquest of itself' (*R2* 2.1.66). Repeatedly, male characters look into a future they fear is slipping out of their control, either due to changing political tides or their own impending death. This is in itself an instructive difference between male and female characters' relationships to power: there is very little that can permanently remove a male character's political autonomy besides mortality. Female characters do die, of course, but it is almost always offstage, and often after a prolonged absence from the stage indicative of their separation from both political and structural power. King Henry VI, for example, floats at the margins of power for three plays, but is only decisively severed from it by death. In the penultimate scene of *3 Henry VI,* aware he is about to be killed, King Henry looks forward into the future:

> And thus I prophesy: that many a thousand
> Which now mistrust no parcel of my fear,
> And many an old man's sigh, and many a widow's
> And many an orphan's water-standing eye,
> Men for their sons, wives for their husbands,
> Orphans for their parents' timeless death,
> Shall rue the hour that ever thou wast born (5.6.37-43).

Transitioning from this foresight into a narrative of Richard's birth, and the accompanying ill omens that seem to offer proof of what he foresees, Henry sounds a great deal like the mournful, prophetic women discussed in Chapter 3. Having short-sightedly trusted York and his sons to keep their word at the beginning of the play, on the brink of death, Henry gains the clarity to see who Richard really is and who he will become. Kavita Mudan Finn notes that York himself likewise turns to the 'primarily feminine rhetorical tropes' of cursing and prophecy before his death, which 'signifies [his] diminished position'.[14]

[14] Mudan Finn, p. 158.

Prophecies inspired by purely political marginalisation do occur, as in *1 Henry VI* when Warwick, despite initially insisting that he is unfit to arbitrate the conflict between Somerset and York, finds himself taking sides and is driven to 'prophesy: this brawl today, / Grown to this faction in the Temple garden, / Shall send, between the red rose and the white, / A thousand souls to death and deadly night' (2.4.124-7). Warwick, no longer able to prevent this conflict, is correct in his vision of its potential outcome.

A similar moment occurs in *2 Henry VI*, when the Duke of Gloucester, who has repeatedly insisted that his innocence will protect him from his political enemies, realises that he is doomed. His death, he tells King Henry, 'is made the prologue to their play; / For thousands more, that yet suspect no peril, / Will not conclude their plotted tragedy' (3.1.151-3). Queen Margaret, with false magnanimity, emphasises the powerlessness of Gloucester's position when she declines to scold him for insulting her: 'I can give the loser leave to chide' (3.1.182). Though Gloucester's death is not formally plotted until the end of the scene, and not carried out until the next, his complete separation from political power has already been enacted, and for the first time he can see the internecine threats he previously believed himself to be immune to. His invocation of theatrical language highlights the association, discussed in Chapter 2, between theatrical privilege—a character's metatheatrical awareness of their control over the mechanisms of the stage—and the historical privilege of seeing the future.

In stark contrast to Gloucester's clarity of vision are the mistaken prophecies of the ascendant Edward IV, who interprets his vision of three suns as a promise that he and his two brothers will 'join our lights together / and overshine the earth' (*3H6* 2.1.37-8), or takes the promise that '"G"/ Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be' to mean his brother George, not the real killer, Gloucester (*R3* 1.1.39-50). As with female characters, prophetic accuracy

increases the closer men draw to the margins of power, while those firmly in control of their own historical destiny cannot see beyond the frame of history into what is yet to come.

Genealogies, too, appear in the mouths of male characters who have been deprived of any other means of asserting their version of history. The elderly Mortimer recites one of Shakespeare's most famous and lengthy genealogies to his nephew York, passing on the mantle of the familial claim to power that he failed to secure, and will now be prevented from pursuing by his impending death (*1H6* 2.5). As he slips farther from power in *Richard II,* Gaunt increasingly draws on the genealogical language first used, as Molly Smith highlights, by his sister-in-law the Duchess of Gloucester.[15] Reference to the Plantagenet bloodline becomes a means for Gaunt to express his frustration and despair at his nephew Richard's reckless rule. In her single scene, the Duchess of Gloucester emphasises the 'seven fair branches springing from one root' (1.2.13) while Gaunt subordinates the familial claim to revenge to the rights of monarchy. But in Gaunt's final appearance in the play, he repeatedly refers to his father and brothers. Only as he nears death is he able, like Lady Percy and the female historians discussed in the previous chapter, to recontextualise what has come before in light of what he now understands, looking simultaneously to the past and future: 'O, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye / Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons, / From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame, / Deposing thee before thou wert possessed, / Which art possessed now to depose thyself' (2.1.104-8). In foreseeing Richard's self-deposition, he demonstrates precisely the prophetic power he longs to assign to Richard's grandfather, recalling Lady Percy's unique ability to influence the present by speaking for those who are gone.

A different kind of clarity comes to men on the brink of death in *Richard III,* who suddenly recognise the power of Margaret's curses earlier in the play. 'Now Margaret's curse

[15] Smith, p. 286.

is fall'n upon our heads,' Grey realises before he and his companions are executed (3.3.13). Such deadly clarity strikes again just a scene later: 'O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse / Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head' (3.4.97-8) Buckingham not only evokes her name, but quotes her directly: 'Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head. / "When he [Richard]," quoth she, "shall split thy heart with sorrow, / Remember Margaret was a prophetess"' (5.1.25-7). Delivering these lines, the male characters, like many female characters, seem to step temporarily outside of the linear temporality of the drama and see the broad scope of the curse that has been working against them. Grey and Rivers use this power to attempt to expand the curse beyond themselves— 'Then cursed she Richard, then cursed she Buckingham, / Then cursed she Hastings. O, remember, God, / To hear her prayer for them as now for us' (3.3.15-7)—and prove successful, or at least accurate in foreseeing the potency of Margaret's already-created curse. From these feminine structural positions, all of these male characters exit to their deaths. In Shakespeare's Globe's 2019 production, this sense of stepping outside was envisioned literally, as the characters' textually offstage deaths were instead depicted, the prophetic lines shifted to become post-mortem direct address. This emphasised their dislocation from the usual stream of history and foreshadowed their reappearance as ghosts to enact the final stage of Margaret's curse.

None of these characters has been widely described by critics as effeminate, nor do their personal traits suggest that an early modern audience would have considered them as such. They reflect instead the gendered conflict embedded within Shakespeare's history plays, between those who manipulate the political currents of the plays and thus cannot see them clearly, and those who, powerless, are granted the ability to observe and sometimes to describe history's full scope. The insistent association of marginalisation with femininity across Shakespeare's history plays displays an important aspect of the sense, expressed by the critics above, that the central symbolic conflict of the plays cannot be separated from the

question of gender. This chapter will propose three primary forms of structural effeminacy in Shakespeare's history plays, three sites of blurred gender boundaries between men and women: insufficiently masculine men who are forced into feminine exclusion from history, female historians who restore their male relatives into the masculine historical record, and boy characters, whose age and casting places them in a sometimes indeterminate gendered position both culturally and onstage. Because early modern definitions of effeminacy are often illegible to contemporary audiences, this chapter will draw particularly heavily on performance case studies to investigate the durability of these structural tendencies, which emerge even in places where the effeminacy of the characters in question is not readily perceived by contemporary expectations of masculinity.

Effeminate men and women's history

1 Henry VI opens with a scene of extravagant mourning that recalls the displays of loss and sorrow enacted by the female characters described earlier in this thesis. Unlike these unruly and disruptive figures, however, *1 Henry VI* depicts an authorised form of mourning, a state funeral for King Henry V that is disrupted not by inappropriately excessive sorrow, but by those who are criticised as paying insufficient attention to the scene of loss they are enacting, focusing instead on petty personal rivalries (1.1.44). The oldest of the deceased King Henry V's brothers, the Duke of Bedford, takes on the role of the chief mourner, painting in vivid terms the personal and political dispossession that will stem from Henry's death. Bedford's description of a world with 'none but women left to wail the dead' (1.1.49) evokes the feminine history-telling that the plays discussed in earlier chapters, including *Richard II, Richard III,* and *1* and *2 Henry IV,* all depict as a force for relative good. But Bedford's speech expresses anxiety over the possibility of an England left unpeopled of anyone but mourning women. His fear reveals the other side of female memorialisation: not the women

who speak, but the men they speak about. While the previous chapter demonstrated that women's mourning and history-telling has distinct power, Bedford suggests that for a man, being made the object of a woman's memories is a fate to be feared. It means, after all, that the man in question has died and permanently lost his ability to make a mark on history. Moreover, as this chapter will demonstrate, it means he has failed to root his image in the structured, documented preserves of masculinised history, forced instead to rely on the often unstable, marginalised narratives of women. In such male characters, structural and personal effeminacy are often united, though not always in terms that are readily legible to contemporary audiences and readers. In this union of personal and structural effeminacy, a character's insufficient masculinity in his personal conduct bleeds into his position in history itself, suggesting that one of the central threats of 'womanly' behaviour in Shakespeare's history plays is the risk of thereby assuming a woman's place in history.

When the Oregon Shakespeare Festival cast Alejandra Escalante as Hotspur in 2017, some audience complaints centred on the fact that a woman could not possibly play the hyper-masculine Hotspur; on the opposite note, the positive reception of Jade Anouka's portrayal of the character in Phyllida Lloyd's all female production was in part because, as Jacqueline Rose writes in her review of the performance, Anouka's own gender threw the character's performance of idealised masculinity into stark relief by contrast.[16] Along similar lines, Roberta Barker argues that 'the readings of Hotspur's role that dominate page and stage at a given time will most likely be those that reproduce their own cultures' normative concepts of masculine heroism'.[17] But despite this reputation as the ideal of manliness, Hotspur in fact bears distinct signs of effeminacy. He is even described as such by other characters, as when his uncle Worcester accuses him of 'break[ing] into this woman's mood /

[16] Rose, 'At the Donmar'.
[17] Roberta Barker, 'Tragical-Comical-Historical Hotspur,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54 (2003), 288–307, p. 299.

Tying thine ear to no tongue but thine own!' (1.3.245-6). His unstoppable tongue and his bursts of anger are now read as masculine stereotypes, but in the early modern period both were markers of effeminacy, proof of a lack of temperance and self-control.[18]

In her speech in remembrance of Hotspur, Lady Percy highlights these shortcomings, noting that his fame was so great that imitators even mimicked his faults: 'speaking thick, which nature made his blemish, / Became the accents of the valiant; / For those that could speak low and tardily / Would turn their own perfection to abuse / To seem like him' (2.3.24-8). Early twentieth century Hotspurs, most famously Laurence Olivier, interpreted these lines to mean that Hotspur spoke with a stammer, but Lady Percy more likely refers to his tendency towards fits of temper and uncontrolled verbal outbursts .[19] This effort to reconfigure Hotspur's faults into evidence of his greatness—though Lady Percy herself acknowledges that his temper was a 'blemish' and an imperfection—reflects the narrative instability that accompanies feminine history-telling. A male character who cannot tell his own story naturally loses control over how the history of his actions is depicted and deployed.

By reframing rather than conventionally erasing her husband's faults, Lady Percy highlights them, and draws particular attention to the negative traits most associated with effeminacy. Moreover, she does this in order to encourage her father-in-law to make a choice of which Hotspur himself would surely not approve: to abandon his allies and flee to Scotland rather than going to war. When Lady Percy vanishes from history after her single scene in *2 Henry IV*, Hotspur vanishes with her. He is mentioned in the play only once by those outside his family, characterised by the new generation of rebels as a rash failure. Lord Bardolph raises him as a cautionary example, someone 'who lined himself with hope, / […]

[18] Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 29-30.
[19] Scott McMillin, *Henry IV Part One.* Shakespeare in Performance Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 27.

And so, with great imagination / Proper to madmen, led his powers to death' (1.3.29-34). With his true legacy consigned to the marginal world of women, the voices of masculine history misremember him, disdain him, then forget him. Though echoes of his style of speech endure in the language deployed by Henry V in his battles in France, they go unacknowledged as such. With none but a woman left to weep his death, Hotspur loses his place in the history made by men. Hotspur is one of several prominent characters in the second tetralogy to trace this structural path. Richard II, Falstaff, and Henry Bolingbroke represent different kinds of effeminacy—different from Hotspur and from one another—but all demonstrate how effeminacy blurs the line between masculine and feminine roles in history as it is both performed and retold.

Since his inclusion in Patricia Parker's *Literary Fat Ladies,* Falstaff's feminine traits have been widely recognised.[20] His leaky corpulence, his verbal excess, and his own references to his 'womb' all echo early modern beliefs about the uncontrollable female body. He is set in perhaps ironic contrast to Prince Hal, who is the only character in the first tetralogy to be explicitly called effeminate, but consistently demonstrates that this is not an accurate assessment; indeed, his soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 1 of *1 Henry IV* cautions the audience against taking other characters' descriptions of his bad behaviour at face value. Fred B. Tromly notes that despite his reputation for wanton disorder, Hal 'shows no interest in women, and it is not clear that he ever actually takes a drink […] Hal is obsessed throughout the play with the paying of debts, those of other people as well as his own'.[21] This fixation on redeeming debts—beginning with his promise to 'pay the debt I never promised' in this first and only soliloquy in the *Henry IV* plays (*1H4* 1.2.197)—belies his apparent effeminate and irresponsible lack of interest in his political duties, as it links him directly to the preferred

[20] Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987).
[21] Fred B. Tromly, *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 97.

political metaphor of the rebellious Percys. King Henry IV 'studies day and night / To answer all the debt he owes to you' (1.3.184-5), Hotspur reminds his father and uncle, and Worcester agrees that 'the King will always think him[self] in our debt' (1.3.284). Hal's allusion to 'the debt I never promised' (1.2.197) not only suggests his awareness of the specific political currents at work in his country, but points to another distinctly masculine trait that other characters believe he lacks: the ability to set aside self interest.

Rebecca Ann Bach proposes that Shakespeare's history plays 'degrade self-actualizing goals and the pursuit of individual pleasure', instead framing ideal masculinity as 'diametrically opposed to "selfe-loue"'.[22] This is another key element of the gendered contrast between Hal and Falstaff, one that the scene of Hal's rejection of Falstaff makes legible in both contemporary and early modern terms. Falstaff's effeminacy—expressed primarily through his determined pursuit of personal pleasure at the expense of any responsibility to a greater good—is one reason Hal must reject him. But the rejection itself can be read in terms of our own gender tropes, as Falstaff displays a stereotypically feminine degree of excessive emotional attachment, assuming personal ties will supersede political propriety, while Hal turns him away with cool, strategic, masculine detachment.

In *DruidShakespeare,* a 2015 production by Irish company Druid that combined abbreviated versions of *Richard II, 1* and *2 Henry IV,* and *Henry V,* activation of contemporary resonances through casting as well as the production's marathon format allowed Falstaff's literal and metaphorical banishment from the centre of historical power to be displayed to an unusually full extent. Director (and company artistic director) Garry Hynes employed what was repeatedly described in interviews as 'gender blind' casting,[23] in which the characters' genders did not necessarily correlate to those of the actors playing them,

[22] Bach, p. 22.
[23] Paddy Kehoe, 'Film recalls Druid's history making production,' *Raidió Teilifís Éireann,* 15 December 2015 < https://www.rte.ie/entertainment/2015/1214/752375-druidic-powers-druid-do-shakespeare/>.

including the casting of female actor Aisling O'Sullivan as Prince Hal. Masculine Hal played by a woman and effeminate Falstaff played by a man emphasised the performativity of these gender ideals—both in the sense proposed by Judith Butler, but also in the terms I have suggested in this chapter so far: that effeminacy functions as a structural position, a way of existing within Shakespeare's dramaturgy rather than purely as a personal characteristic or mode of behaviour.[24] By the end of *2 Henry IV,* Falstaff, whatever his gender or the gender of the actor playing him, begins to function as a woman dramaturgically. His inability to adapt to Hal's masculine style, the tone of the dominant history Hal enters as he ceases to be the 'young wanton and effeminate boy' (5.3.10) his father despairs of in *Richard II* and becomes a king, means Falstaff cannot exist within that history.

While the characters discussed at the beginning of this chapter lose their place in history through political dispossession or death, Falstaff is explicitly banished, an exclusion that operates both literally—he must leave court—and metaphorically—he has no place in the history Henry will build. This is demonstrated in *Henry V,* when Captain Fluellen muses about the similarities between King Henry and Alexander the Great, both of whom, among other supposed similarities, banished close friends. At first, however, Fluellen cannot remember the name of King Henry's former friend. In the text, Captain Gower supplies the name for him (4.7.45). In *DruidShakespeare,* though Gower (played by Rory Nolan, who also played Falstaff) began to deliver this line, Fluellen cut him off with his next line before the name could be spoken out loud. More completely than in the original text, *DruidShakespeare* banished even Falstaff's memory from the battlefields where the play's masculine history is made. While this is the last mention of Falstaff in the original text, a gradual reduction of references that echoes the slow fading of Hotspur from memory in *2 Henry IV,* in *DruidShakespeare*'s *Henry V,* it was the first time his name was spoken—or almost spoken.

[24] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Adaptor Mark O'Rowe rearranged several of *Henry V*'s scenes, most notably shifting Hostess Quickly's description of Falstaff's death to the very end of the play, a feminine counterpoint (though played by a man) to the Chorus's subversive concluding speech. Hynes staged the textual but offstage deaths of Bardolph, Nym, and the Boy and added an onstage death in battle for Pistol, leaving Hostess Quickly to share her final memory of Falstaff surrounded by the bodies of her husband and her companions, a stage picture that transformed the words into a de facto eulogy for them as well. All of the men rose from their deaths over the course of the speech to silently bid farewell to the Hostess and depart for the war—and to depart the stage—once more. As the last to speak Falstaff's name, in this adaptation the Hostess mirrored Lady Percy's role as bearer of her male companions' legacy, confirming the effeminate Falstaff's consignment to feminised history that cannot travel beyond the world of the tavern and to the battlefields of France, and cannot be memorialised in the kind of mythic history that *Henry V*'s Chorus labours to construct.

Falstaff's erasure from history stands in contrast to the legacy of another effeminate male character in both *DruidShakespeare* and the texts themselves: King Richard II. Though Richard is described throughout the play and its sequels in terms of irresponsibility and frivolity, it is notable, given his current critical reputation, that he is never explicitly described as effeminate. Like Hotspur, he is associated with femininity in terms of his speech—Mowbray scorns his attempts at peace-making in the play's first scene as 'the trial of a woman's war' (1.1.48) in contrast to the trial by combat he and Bolingbroke wish to undertake—and in his excessive self-interest and attachment to his favourites at the expense of all others. Richard's imagination itself is subtly gendered feminine, as Lisa Hopkins highlights, in his famous prison monologue, where he strains to make his 'brain […] prove the female to my soul' (5.5.6).

In *DruidShakespeare,* actor Marty Rea's costume (a fitted gold bodice and floor-length purple skirt), his full face of white make-up, and his delicate mannerisms projected what a modern audience is poised to read as effeminacy, explicitly evoking images of Renaissance femininity through white cosmetics suggestive of Queen Elizabeth I. This struck a distinct contrast to Derbhle Crotty's grounded, stoic Bolingbroke, dressed in leather and dark jeans. Crotty's own description of her performance of the role emphasised a sense of contrast between actor's body and character's gender, commenting that the production's design choices 'reassured the audience that we were not in any way attempting to convince them that we are men'.[25] In other words, Crotty experienced and intended a dissonance between her own body as a female actor and the male character that she played. While the production's design choices could be read as a challenge to the notion of a biological gender binary—that is, the rejection of the idea that gender is essentially defined by secondary sex characteristics—I wish instead to explore the character's arc on the terms Crotty herself proposed. In doing so, I do not wish to reject the rich possibilities of the former, transgender reading,[26] but to focus on the sense of contrast rooted in a binary conception of gender that Crotty's language reflects, both because it remains the dominant mode for interpreting the genders of bodies onstage, and because it reflects the early modern beliefs about the firmly biological but also extremely slippery nature of gender, which included the belief that extreme transgression of one's gender role could result in a literal physical change from one sex to another.[27]

The production's stated desire for 'blindness' to the actors' genders seemed to be borne out by the distinct difference between Richard's feminine presentation and the actual bearing

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[25] Peter Crawley, 'Blood, sweat and breasts: Derbhle Crotty's bold approach to acting,' *Irish Times,* 23 February 2016 < https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/blood-sweat-and-breasts-derbhle-crotty-s-bold-approach-to-acting-1.2541284>.
[26] See Robin Craig, *Assimilation or Resistance: The Medicalised Body in 21st Century Shakespearean Performance* (forthcoming doctoral thesis, University of Roehampton, London).
[27] Orgel, p. 20.

and aesthetic of any of the women onstage. *DruidShakespeare* went on to suggest, however, that Richard's effeminacy was no less a performance than Crotty's embodiment of Bolingbroke's ideal masculinity—that unlike Sullivan's Hal and Nolan's Falstaff, perhaps the 'truth' of both characters lay in collapsing the gap between actor and character's gender.

In the scene before his death in prison at Pomfret Castle, Richard's costume and cosmetics were implied to be a betrayal of the 'true' maleness of his body. In this scene, Rea washed away his white make-up, removing the blank canvas of his presentational cosmetics even as he gave a speech imagining transforming himself into kings, beggars, and everything in between. Shortly after, he undertook one of his few actions in the play that can be considered unequivocally masculine in both early modern and contemporary terms: the murder of Exton's servants in self defence when they entered to kill him. Productions often cut this brief triumph of strength on Richard's part, but Rea's Richard was able to kill several men before Exton himself entered. Having dispensed with his feminine costume and cosmetics, the prison fight allowed Rea's Richard to display masculine physical might he was never previously implied to possess, answering violence with violence and thereby forcing his way back into Bolingbroke's masculine history. This happens very literally in the play's next scene, when his corpse intrudes suddenly into Bolingbroke's new court, and the indelible guilt of his deposition and murder haunt the subsequent three plays. As with Falstaff's arc, *DruidShakespeare*'s presentation of the entire second tetralogy allowed the enduring resonance of Richard's death, and its ability to shape the events of the reigns of King Henry IV and his son, to be explicitly demonstrated in a way that a performance of *Richard II* alone cannot depict as fully. This was made manifest in *Henry V,* when King Henry's prayer the night before battle that God 'think not upon the faults my father made / In compassing the crown' (4.1.281-2) was accompanied by appearance of the spectre of Richard himself at Henry's side.

Richard and Falstaff thus highlight that the fear of effeminacy haunts Shakespeare's history plays not only as the threat of failure to uphold cultural expectations of manliness, but as a danger that men, too, can be forced to the margins of power and relegated to feminine historical legacies. *DruidShakespeare*'s Richard II and Falstaff demonstrate this possibility in condensed form, Richard escaping the need to be memorialised by his wife with a final act of masculine strength that allowed him to assert his presence in the minds of both King Henrys to follow, and Falstaff ultimately forgotten by masculinised history and, like Hotspur, memorialised only by the women left behind by war.

When Rea's Richard appeared during King Henry V's battlefield prayer, he was accompanied by Crotty's Henry IV. Henry V's description of his father's actions in his prayer, however, is far from flattering. Much like Lady Percy's appropriation of Hotspur's memory, Henry V distorts his father's legacy in favour of Richard's: Richard's name is spoken, but Henry IV's is passed over. Throughout *Henry V,* the King seeks to construct a genealogy that will erase his father, repeatedly making reference to his great-grandfather Edward III—'from whom you claim' (1.2.105), the Archbishop of Canterbury notes when authorising the French war, a formulation that skips two generations and draws a direct line from Edward to Henry, placing both France and England as inheritances that Henry V can claim without guilt.

King Henry IV is not often counted amongst the effeminate characters of the second tetralogy, but Meghan C. Andrews argues persuasively in favour of reading him as such. She demonstrates his effeminacy in early modern terms, including his self-description as 'cold and temperate,' (*1H4* 1.3.1) a humoural state associated with femininity, in contrast to warm, dry masculinity; his undesired but apparently unstoppable tears when confronting his son in Act 3 Scene 2 of *1 Henry IV*; the fact that Shakespeare never once depicts him achieving personal success in battle; and parallels between the play's political tensions and those of

Shakespeare's England that cast Henry in the role of Queen Elizabeth I.[28] Falstaff, too, obliquely accuses King Henry of effeminacy, describing the 'cold blood that [Prince Hal] did naturally inherit of his father' (5.5.113), which his second son John supposedly likewise shares, making him prone to 'a kind of male green-sickness' (4.2.89)—an illness exclusively associated with young women, which Falstaff claims Hal has avoided by heating his blood with wine. While there is arguably some humoural logic in Falstaff's insistence that wine, a choleric drink, can counteract effeminate cold bloodedness, the abstemious self-control that Falstaff complains of in John would, as discussed above, be considered highly masculine. However, the plays affirm Falstaff's conclusion in another sense: if John inherits effeminacy from his father, Hal does not. The prince who will become Henry V will write his name in history in part by erasing his father's.

One of the feminine structural features Henry IV becomes associated with is prophecy. His relationship to prophecy follows a feminised path similar to the men in *Richard III* who fall victim to Margaret's curses, discussed above. As he sleeplessly ponders his role as monarch, he recalls, almost verbatim, the words of King Richard—another moment that emphasises Richard's successful reassertion of his presence in the masculine historical record. Henry quotes one of Richard's feminised moments of prophetic speech, though, oddly, it is a moment for which he was not actually present in Shakespeare's earlier play, recalling Lady Percy and Richard II's Queen's ability to narrate histories from which they were excluded:

> When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears,
> Then checked and rated by Northumberland,
> Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy?
> "Northumberland, thou ladder by the which
> My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne"—
> Though then, God knows, I had no such intent,
> But that necessity so bowed the state

[28] Meghan C. Andrews, 'Gender, Genre, and Elizabeth's Princely Surrogates in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*', *Studies in English Literature* 54.2 (2014), 375-399, pp. 379-81.

> That I and greatness were compelled to kiss—
> "The time shall come," thus did he follow it,
> "The time will come that foul sin, gathering head,
> Shall break into corruption"—so went on,
> Foretelling this same time's condition
> And the division of our amity (3.1.66-78).

During this speech, *DruidShakespeare* underlined the effeminacy of prophecy by drawing a direct link between this speech, Bolingbroke's physical weakness, and femininity. As Henry IV's political and physical frailty increased, the production drew increasing attention through costume to Crotty's body beneath the character of Henry IV. As Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, Crotty wore a bulky black jacket and jeans that, as Crotty noted in the interview quoted above, neither emphasised nor attempted to disguise her body. This jacket was later shed to reveal a more tailored blouse, which she retained through the play and into *1 Henry IV,* though after King Henry's coronation, it was paired with the same scarlet velvet king's robes that Richard had previously worn.

In the heavily adapted productions, *2 Henry IV* began with the speech quoted above, which famously concludes, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown' (3.1.30-1). Crotty's Henry entered visibly ill, shuffling slowly and leaning on a cane, fully half of her body covered in a mottled red rash that had begun to appear in the previous play, inspired, as she explained in an interview, by historical accounts that claimed King Henry IV suffered from leprosy.[29] The disease was made visible by Crotty's translucent black robe, under which she was nude. This simultaneous revelation of the extent of Bolingbroke's disease and Crotty's body directly associated her femininity with Henry's weakness, a gesture that recalls the fact that, as Phyllis Rackin writes, 'in Renaissance accounts of the body […] the body itself— male as well as female— was gendered feminine'.[30] This dichotomy, Rackin explains,

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[29] Crawley, online.
[30] Phyllis Rackin, 'Historical Difference/Sexual Difference' in *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England,* ed. by Jean R. Brink (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 1993), 37-64, p. 39.

justified female subjugation by associating femininity with the sinful body in contrast to the pure, male soul. In his decay and mortality, King Henry IV's body was explicitly feminised, while the mind and body politic (as well as the pronouns and titles used by the other characters) remained that of a man and a king. Just as Rea's Richard found his 'true' masculine strength after doing away with his feminine clothing and cosmetics, the 'true' feminine weakness of Crotty's Bolingbroke could only be disguised, not erased, by the trappings of kingship.

Andrews argues that such a transition from masculine to feminine is the basic movement of every Shakespearean history play: they 'compulsively enact and re-enact the shift from effeminate monarch to masculine monarch, only for the masculine monarch to become feminized'. Andrews links this repeating arc to the cultural fears surrounding Queen Elizabeth's old age, arguing that for Shakespeare, this process of feminisation is not necessarily a decline. Rather, 'the histories embody a fantasy of a renewed Elizabeth, monarchial femininity returned to youth and power'.[31] Andrews argues that 'Hal's rhetoric itself is one of the unacknowledged feminine powers at [*Henry V*'s] core', acting simultaneously as the metaphorical promise of Elizabethan renewal and as a threat encoded in the audience's knowledge of the impending failures of Henry's effeminate son.[32] Andrews' reading usefully illustrates the difference between reading effeminate traits into a character and the structural effeminacy I describe here. Though elements of his language may be feminine, Henry V's ability to forcefully control historical events, and the powerful presence of his memory after his death, argues for his firm entrenchment in masculine history. Indeed, through his continual invocation in *1 Henry VI,* he can be seen as a presence in Shakespeare's sense of medieval history even before Shakespeare had written a version of the

[31] Andrews, p. 393.
[32] Andrews, pp. 383-5.

character, the power of his historical reputation sufficient to give him imaginary force without Shakespeare needing to explicitly depict him. Henry V may draw upon the kinds of rhetorical tricks that Mowbray and Hotspur deride as feminine, but he marshals them in defiance of the kind of structural effeminacy and marginalisation that leads to his father's name never being spoken in *Henry V,* his legacy reduced to usurpation.

If, as Andrews suggests, the unnamed presence of Elizabeth shapes the second tetralogy's relationship to gender, her actual presence in *Henry VIII* initially appears to entirely invert Shakespeare's usual gendering of historical power, as the voice of prophecy in *Henry VIII* is the voice of authority, not marginalisation. Though Queen Katherine has recourse to the language of mourning and genealogy, discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, the play's most conspicuous prophetic language belongs to a man, Archbishop Cranmer. It is he who delivers the play's concluding vision of the future glories of Elizabeth and King James I. Unlike feminine prophecies in earlier history plays, it is delivered from a position of and in compliance with masculine power.

A production during the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival, presented by the Spanish company Rakata, restored Shakespeare's usual gendering of prophecy by framing the entire fifth act as Katherine's nightmare vision of a Protestant future, in which the glorious reigning queen of England would be not her own daughter, but Anne Bullen's. But even in the unadapted text, a female character—albeit one who does not and cannot speak—initiates and enables the play's concluding prophesy. Though Cranmer speaks the lines that foretell Elizabeth's glorious reign, the presence of the infant Elizabeth creates a causal link between the female child and the man who speaks a vision of her future. In this scene, King Henry addresses two of the many unspeaking noblewomen who are present for Princess Elizabeth's christening:

> KING HENRY
> I thank you heartily; so shall this lady

When she has so much English.

CRANMER
Let me speak, sir (5.4.13-5).

Cranmer then launches into his vision of Elizabeth's future. But coming in immediate response to Henry's promise of future thanks from Elizabeth, it is as if his lines are spoken on Elizabeth's behalf. Henry's reply to the vision creates a further link between Elizabeth and this prophecy, as he praises Cranmer: 'O lord archbishop, / Thou hast made me now a man. Never before / This happy child did I get anything' (5.4.63-5). The prophecy and Henry's subsequent comment supplant Mary and erase Edward, rendering Elizabeth Henry's only heir and bearer of his legacy. Henry's assertion that the knowledge of her future fame has 'made [him] a man' recalls once more the simultaneously redemptive and complicated power of entrusting a man's legacy to a woman to bear. Like Hotspur, the consignment of Henry VIII's legacy to a daughter suggests the fulfilment of the threats of effeminacy that plague him throughout the play, not least in his determined and insistently sexual pursuit of Anne Bullen.[33] But the play and Henry himself frame this instead as confirmation of his masculinity. His legacy, previously unsteady, is assured. And by allowing Cranmer to deliver this speech, the feminised Tudor legacy that Elizabeth's female rule will represent is masculinised, assured a place not in the marginal spaces of women's history, but the chronicles recorded by men.

Feminine historians and returning to history

While the second tetralogy and *Henry VIII* fit relatively smoothly into the cyclical journey of effeminacy to masculinity that Andrews proposes, matters are more complicated in

[33] Gordon McMullan, 'Introduction' in *Henry VIII*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), pp. 83-4.

Shakespeare's earlier history plays. While prophecy and feminised speech pervade the *Henry VI* plays, the *Henry IV* sequence is much more sceptical. In these later plays, the ability to predict the future is either mocked (as with Hotspur's derision at Glendower's pretensions to mysticism [*1H4* 3.1]) or rationalised (as with Warwick's famous counsel that 'there is a history in all men's lives' that can help one guess at what they will do, rather than actual prophetic ability [*2H4* 3.1.79]), and the structural effeminisation of characters like Richard, Falstaff, and Bolingbroke is accordingly subtle. Rather than expressing their exclusion from masculinised history by stepping outside of its confines and looking into the future, this exclusion is demonstrated by the ways they are remembered, by their failure to ensure their place in the masculine historical narratives created by others. Because the *Henry VI* plays relate to feminised forms of speech differently, it is only logical that feminised history itself takes a different form. Richard II's arc reveals that death need not mean the end of a character's role in history; in *Richard III,* the boundary between life and death becomes even more porous. The distinction between masculine and effeminate characters is likewise blurry throughout the first tetralogy, and particularly complicated by the prominent figure of Queen Margaret, who moves between masculine and feminine historical spheres repeatedly across the four plays in which she appears. Her movement between dramaturgical positions emphasises the separation between character gender and gendered structural role, highlighting the first tetralogy's more complex transgressions of gendered roles and expectations. This permits a more complete, and thus more disruptive, restoration of effeminate characters to a place in history.

Though she is perhaps the most famous curser and prophetess in the history plays, Queen Margaret's association with these feminine styles of speech is not a constant; rather, her ability to access such supernatural powers fluctuates across the four plays of the first tetralogy. As discussed in Chapter 1, I am sceptical of the claim that Margaret can or should

be read as a single cohesive character across the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* in any contemporary, psychological sense of the word. However, her consistent relationship to mourning and cursing can be seen to demonstrate not necessarily continuity of character, but the fixed relationship in Shakespeare's history plays overall between loss and these modes of feminine speech, as the farther Margaret drifts from power within each of the *Henry VI* plays, the more prominent such aspects of her speech become. The more access Margaret has to political power—to the ability to shape the unfolding events—the less she has to the power to curse and prophesy. Throughout *2 Henry VI,* she strategically deploys exaggerated mourning at moments when her power over Henry appears to be slipping. Like the mourning discussed in the previous chapter, these speeches revise the past in service of her goals in the present. Her first association with cursing appears in that same play, during her farewell to Suffolk, her newly exiled lover (a scene discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). In a line that hints at why artists and critics have been so irresistibly drawn to reading Margaret's journey through the plays as a single character arc, she urges Suffolk—as she will Elizabeth and the Duchess of York in *Richard III*—to find 'the spirit to curse thine enemies' (3.2.319). Her derision of his failure to do so as the behaviour of a 'coward woman and soft-hearted wretch' (3.2.311) is highly ironic in light of the previously discussed associations between cursing and femininity. Within a few lines, both persuade themselves of the futility of cursing and abandon the effort.

The reason for their inability to access extra-historical power becomes clearer in Suffolk's final scene, for unlike the characters discussed above, as Suffolk approaches his death, he refuses to acknowledge his loss of power. Reminded of a prophecy that he would die by water (a homophone, in the accent of the time, of 'Walter', the pirate who is determined to kill him), he shakes off the coincidence in terms that highlight the class difference between his own aristocratic, French-speaking Norman ancestry and the English

commoner Walter: 'Thy name is Gaultier, being rightly sounded' (4.1.48). Rather than dying in feminised awareness of the accuracy of prophecy or cursing, he insists upon his power to the last, inscribing his name into masculine history as he is borne away to death:

> Come, soldiers, show what cruelty you can,
> That this my death may never be forgot!
> Great men oft die by vile bezonians:
> A Roman sworder and banditto slave
> Murdered sweet Tully; Brutus' bastard hand
> Stabbed Julius Caesar; savage islanders
> Pompey the Great, and Suffolk dies by pirates (4.1.133-9)

Placing himself in a line of famous murdered men, Suffolk insists upon his enduring ability to shape his own legacy, thereby denying himself the clarity that comes from stepping outside of the frame of historical events.

In her next scene, Margaret performs a grotesquely literal version of her later efforts to revive the memory and presence of a deceased male partner by carrying and speaking to Suffolk's decapitated head, cradling it as she imagines how readily the growing civil unrest would be quieted 'were the Duke of Suffolk now alive!' (4.4.40). The head's obtrusive appearance, rendered even more shocking by the other characters' disregard of its presence, strands Margaret in a liminal theatrical space between the political power of the *locus* and historical privilege of the *platea* discussed in Chapter 3. She appears somewhere outside of the action, her borderline necrophilic adoration of Suffolk's head apparently unnoticed by the other characters, and yet she cannot yet claim the privileges of feminised speech that would attend on entering the marginalised space of the historical *platea,* as she can imagine nothing beyond the power Suffolk—and by extension, Margaret herself—*would* exert if only he were there.

Full access to supernatural power demands complete loss of ability to influence history, a state Margaret only achieves in *Richard III*, where her separation from real-world power is so complete that she defies her actual date and place of death in order to appear

onstage. Learning to access the power of feminised forms of speech signals the approaching end of her story, as her prophesies become the last gasp of a character on the brink of complete erasure from the kind of history the plays are dedicated to depicting. While her devotion to Suffolk's head achieves a kind of embodied remembrance, it is one that, like the pleas of Blanche and Lady Percy discussed in Chapter 2, goes completely ignored by the other onstage characters. Her ability not only to command attention in *Richard III,* but to move from the partial embodiment of the dead represented by Suffolk's head into the power of full (if ghostly) embodiment indicates that her complete marginalisation allows her access to a new kind of power. The culmination of the tetralogy is also the culmination of her exclusion from the political influence she has fought for throughout her reign as queen, her mastery of feminised forms of history-telling achievable only when she has fully abandoned this goal. Margaret thus epitomises the gendered conflict at the heart of Shakespeare's history plays. Not, as Andrews suggests, limited to the kings who might be read as stand-ins for Elizabeth herself, Margaret reveals the pattern of feminisation and its attendant marginalisation as a fundamental historical process that Shakespeare's characters continually fear, combat, and often surrender to. By epitomising it, she also complicates it, decisively divorcing what is figured as effeminacy in the male characters of the first tetralogy from a character's actual gender. Margaret, too, becomes effeminate in historical terms, though in narrative terms she has always been a woman.

In addition to complicating the relationship of effeminacy to a character's actual gender, Margaret disrupts the cycle that Andrews proposes defines the histories, reinserting herself into masculine history by using her curses to force men to speak about her. As described above, the male characters that she curses to death repeatedly invoke her name to acknowledge the accuracy of her prophecies and the power of her curses (two concepts that, as Chapter 3 discussed, are often interchangeable). This forceful re-inscription of her name

into masculine history places her in a middle ground between a figure such as Richard II, who ultimately escapes the need for female memorialisation, and one like Henry IV, whose own son removes his name from history. Margaret's complete immersion in feminine structures and styles, and a distinctly feminine defiance of the realities of historical fact, are what enable her to force men to speak her name into their historical record. Though Margaret must become her own feminine historian, she also performs her curses in service of her husband's memory. This creates a structural parallel between Henry VI and Richard II. Both are interpreted by most critics as effeminate, and both initially seem consigned to marginalised, feminine history. Richard escapes this fate in the moment of his death and is ultimately restored to a masculine, politically powerful position in history. Henry VI achieves the same posthumous status by a different means.

As described above, Henry gains access to prophecy in the moments before his death, blending past and future to foretell Richard III's violent reign. But throughout *3 Henry VI,* Henry's structural position is distinctly effeminate, in direct contrast to Margaret's structural masculinity: he is actively excluded from positions of political and military power that she fills instead. He is, indeed, framed as an active impediment: 'The queen hath best success when you are absent' (2.2.74). Thus excluded, he resorts to the language of mourning and lament to engage with the horrors of a war he still feels responsible for, exemplified by the famous scene in which he watches parallel exchanges between a father who has killed his son in battle and a son who has killed his father (2.5.55-122). Unlike Richard, whose corpse disrupts the final scene of *Richard II* and ensures his continued presence in masculine history, Henry disappears after his death, and his presence in *Richard III* is facilitated exclusively by women: only Anne mourns his corpse, and only Margaret insists that his murder be remembered. At the play's conclusion, Margaret's interventions literally restore Henry to the play's history in the form of a ghost—one of only two ghosts, along with his son Prince

Edward, who are not also living characters in the play—a form in which he is able to exert a greater influence on Richard's fate than he was able to in life.

Margaret's achievement was given literal form in Shakespeare's Globe's 2003 all-female production of *Richard III,* where the actor playing Margaret doubled as the ghost of Henry VI, physically embodying the legacy she had laboured for the entire play to force others to recall. From the startling but overlooked presence of Suffolk's head to the appearance of Henry's ghost, Margaret's increasing marginalisation grants her the ability to bring the men she seeks to memorialise into full presence onstage—and to restore the Lancastrian line itself, in the physical form of Richmond, back into full political power and an assured place in history. In the Globe's 2019 staging of the play, this connection was likewise made literal. Margaret's wish that she 'might live and say "the dog is dead"' (4.4.73) came partially true when Richmond defeated Richard in battle and declared that 'The bloody dog is dead' (5.7.2), as the same actor, Steffan Donnelly, both expressed this wish and enacted it in the doubled roles of Margaret and Richmond, allowing Margaret to directly fulfil her own curse, and embody her own house's ultimate victory.

In Headlong Theatre's 2019 production of *Richard III*, which toured to London's Alexandra Palace (the version I will describe here), Henry assumed what could be read as a fully feminised role by taking over Margaret's structural position. Margaret herself was cut from the play; however, director John Haidar returned to *Richard III*'s eighteenth century adaptation tradition and began with Richard's murder of King Henry VI from *3 Henry VI.* Henry haunted the play from this moment onwards, not given Margaret's lines, but given her position as a recurring reminder of past transgressions. Unlike in many standalone productions of this play, references to the events of the *Henry VI* were rarely cut. However, rather than allowing Margaret to embody the intrusive presence of memory that these lines generated, Haidar's adaptation rejected the power of the female mourner to speak for past

events in favour of the now more conventional narrative of a male victim pursuing personal revenge. Even so, Margaret's language of cursing was evidently considered both too important to lose and impossible to reassign to a male character: Lady Anne and the Duchess of York absorbed what lines were retained. Henry spoke nothing but his own lines from *3 Henry VI* and his text as a ghost the night before the Battle of Bosworth.

The placement of Henry's murder by Richard as a prologue to the events of *Richard III* rather than the penultimate scene of *3 Henry VI* emphasised the prophetic nature of Henry's speech to Richard, while due to the reassignment of Margaret's lines, literal cursing and mourning both remained resolutely feminine. Henry's interpolated presence disrupted the connection between these forms of speech and the spirits that ultimately helped defeat Richard in battle: he appeared at each characters' death to beckon the newly deceased to follow him, clearly suggesting that he was marshalling these ghostly forces in preparation for revenge, rather than that they were being called into existence by the women's curses. By disrupting the connection between Henry, the ghosts' revenge, and the women's mourning, Haidar's production rejected the play's associations between femininity and marginalisation, instead imagining a new historical structure wherein men can pursue revenge from beyond the grave unassisted by female memory.

Haidar's revision of roles suggests that Margaret and Henry's unconventional gendered positions fit uneasily within contemporary narrative expectations. She is still seen as an unfit emblem of the martial past, but her intrusive curses are too strangely feminine to seem appropriate for a male character to deliver, even in adapted form; in contrast, allowing a woman to fight for Henry's legacy is still seen as too passive and strange for a king, and he must instead be assigned the role of the actively vengeful spirit in the vein of Hamlet's father or *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Don Andrea. While Hotspur and Bolingbroke's transgressions of gendered norms are largely illegible by twenty-first century standards, Headlong's revisions

suggest the discomfort that Henry and Margaret's complex subversions of their gendered roles can still generate.

Historicising boys

When considering the place of gender in Shakespeare's history plays, it is essential not to overlook the realities of performance in the period: namely, the presence of boy players in female roles. Thomas Lacqueur argues that the influence of Galen's 'one-sex' model in early modern England placed boys and women in related positions as 'not men', and thus closer to one another than to the masculine ideal which they both failed to fulfil. [34] The actual dominance of this model and genuine inability of early modern medical professionals and individuals to recognise the differences between male and female bodies has been challenged by recent critics, notably Helen King.[35] Even Stephen Orgel's influential argument that sexually, boys were 'a middle term' between men and women[36] does not suggest that boys and women were therefore fully interchangeable. Cultural similarities between boys and women were not so complete that a boy player did not need to perform womanhood when playing a female role; indeed, as Will Fisher notes, the place of boys on the early modern gender spectrum meant they were as much in 'drag' when playing men (as in boys' companies) as when playing women, 'naturally' aligning with neither.[37] Farah Karim-Cooper's analysis of the cosmetic world of Elizabethan drama highlights that some effort was required to create a satisfactory illusion of femininity—and specifically female beauty—

[34] Thomas Lacqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[35] Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2016).
[36] Orgel, p. 103.
[37] Will Fisher, *Materialising Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 89.

onstage.[38] The unadorned boy was not sufficient, but rather his femininity had to be actively constructed by a combination of performance, costume, and cosmetics. Boys thus provide a further reminder that the binary terms of 'masculine' and 'feminine' I have deployed are somewhat simplified expressions of what in fact is a fairly fluid boundary, and introduce a complicating element into the gendered framework proposed thus far.

In *Richard III,* both Margaret and Anne seek to revive the memory not only of King Henry, but of Henry and Margaret's son, Prince Edward, who was also Anne's husband. The discrepancy between how Edward is depicted in *3 Henry VI* and how he is described in *Richard III* is further evidence of the difficulties of reading any of the tetralogies as a fully consistent narrative; however, like Margaret, Edward can be used to demonstrate not psychological or even temporal continuity, but consistent gendered structures. In such structural terms, the distance between the two versions of the character reflect Edward's changing relationship to masculinity, and the particular challenge that boy characters pose to early modern gender ideals.

Even by the early modern period's relatively fluid understanding of gender, the position of boys was uncertain and unstable. Alexandra Shepard writes

> youth and old age were approached as 'other' to manhood […] the implicit contest between the generations was more salient to the construction of manhood as a phase in the life course than any comparison between the sexes […] Advice writers and moralists therefore cast the follies of youth in terms of an absence of self-control which they laboured to equate with unmanliness. By contrast, self-mastery was claimed as the defining feature of manhood.[39]

Under a system that viewed masculinity as a state of being that had to actively be achieved and therefore could also be lost, the temperamental and biological separation of boys from men were one and the same: a boy could not be a man because he was not old enough to act like one. Stephen Orgel argues

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[38] Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).
[39] Shepard, pp. 23-8.

> eroticized boys appear to be a middle term between men and women […] But they also destabilise the categories, and question what it means to be a man or a woman […] Whether boys are thought to look like women or not depends on how society constructs the norm of womanliness; clearly it is in our interests to view boys as versions of men, but the Renaissance equally clearly sought the similitude in boys and women.[40]

This potential similarity is the key to Rebecca Ann Bach's understanding of the role of boy characters in the history plays: 'boys are expected to be like women; therefore, when they behave like brave men, their behavior is exceptional, and it is also an example for men, who in these plays can always slip towards effeminacy should they let desire rule'.[41] In the dramaturgical terms of this chapter, the overlapping categories place the boys in a contested historical space. Almost all of the boy characters in Shakespeare's history plays are, like Prince Edward, brutally murdered. Their curtailed lives combine with their indeterminate gendered position to become roles fraught with historical uncertainty, for though they are neither masculine enough nor accomplished enough to guarantee a place in masculine history, their murders are startling turning points in each of their plays, and their memorialisation becomes, as Katie Knowles writes, an image of 'lost dynastic promise'[42] that each play takes great pains to verbally record. But as with many of the male roles discussed above, it is a memorialisation that frequently consigns the characters to feminine history—a space from which Prince Edward alone firmly escapes.

In *3 Henry VI,* Prince Edward is specifically described as a child. Though engaged to Anne near the end of the play, she never appears onstage. His death scene clarifies that he has not grown to marriageable age over the course of the play, but is still 'in respect, a child' (5.5.56). In *Richard III*, however, Richard seems to describe a young man when he speaks of Edward:

> A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman,
> Framed in the prodigality of nature,

[40] Orgel, p. 63.
[41] Bach, p. 236.
[42] Knowles, p. 16.

> Young, valiant, wise, and, no doubt, right royal,
> The spacious world cannot again afford.
> And will she yet abase her eyes on me,
> That cropped the golden prime of this sweet prince
> And made her widow to a woeful bed? (1.2.227-33)

These references to Anne's 'woeful bed' and Edward's 'golden prime' suggest a marriage between two young adults, not the child we saw in *3 Henry VI.* Edward's implied ability to consummate his marriage to Anne would be an essential marker of reaching full adult masculinity[43]— a milestone that *3 Henry VI* pointedly never clarifies. But just as Margaret's memory of Henry restores him to a masculine role in history, Anne's memorialisation of Edward allows him to attain the full masculinity he did not survive to achieve in life. The first to die at Richard's hand, he is the first to return as a ghost in *Richard III*, one again invoking his age: 'Think how thou stabs't me in my prime of youth' (5.4.98). While all the other ghosts offer prayers and good wishes to Richmond, Edward alone promises that 'the wronged souls / Of butchered princes fight in thy behalf' (5.4.100-1), implying that he is one of the fighting princes in question. This active, martial vow affirms his masculinity in both personal and structural terms: he can directly influence the course of history by intervening, and will do so not in the feminine realm of prayers and curses, but the masculine space of combat.

Edward's fellow ghosts, the other Prince Edward (whom I will call Edward of York for clarity) and his brother Prince Richard, express themselves more mildly. Speaking as one, they call upon 'Good angels' to 'guard [Richmond] from the boar's annoy' (5.4.130). While the butchered Prince Edward of Lancaster will 'fight in [Richmond's] behalf', Prince Edward of York offers more passive prayers, and leaves the angels to do the guarding. Through memorialisation by their respective female relations, Edward is turned into a man, the York Princes into angelic boys. Knowles notes that the princes' 'dramatic function is fluid and

[43] Shepard, p. 83.

transitory: there are points are which they seem utterly childish and vulnerable, and points at which they take on roles—some linked to their royal status, others purely theatrical—which seem to invest them with a peculiar kind of power'. This power stems in part, she argues, from Shakespeare's decision not to depict their deaths, a choice which 'distil[s] the boys as emblems of noble innocence, forcing the audience to reflect on the destruction of that innocence, and view it as a kind of desecration'.[44] Their mother likewise draws upon this imagery in her memories of them as 'tender babes' (4.4.9), rendering them feminised not only by their consignment to the realm of female history, but by their mother's posthumous emphasis of their status as children, not yet men. Richard sarcastically describes his younger nephew as 'all his mother's' (3.1.155), an association their deaths only reinforce by rendering their mother the only bearer of their memory.

Shakespeare's other prominent historical boy characters, Arthur in *King John* and the Boy in *Henry V,* fall into the same category of structural effeminacy as the Princes. As Katie Knowles writes, while the Princes 'are only idealised by their mother posthumously, Arthur is romanticised by his while he is alive and present on-stage', consigning him to female memory before he has the chance to acquire a masculine identity of his own: 'He is figured as a blank sheet of paper or perhaps a piece of unformed wax—ready and waiting to receive an impression; to be stamped with the image of his paternal forebears, and to be inscribed upon by those who figure him as a vehicle for the writing of histories'.[45] A 'vehicle for the writing of histories' rather than the driver of his own historical narrative, Arthur is, as with female characters like Lady Anne, inescapably hemmed in by the forces of history. His name alone reveals the foregone historical conclusion before he can ever act to alter it: he cannot and never will be King Arthur. As in the Knowles' observation quoted above, he has been

[44] Knowles, pp. 21, 23.
[45] Knowles, pp. 35, 34.

confined to female memory even before he dies. His strange triple death—mourned first by Constance, lamenting long before his death that 'never, never / Must I behold my pretty Arthur more' (3.4.88-9); again as a 'poor child' with a 'little kingdom of a forcèd grave' (4.2.97-8) when his death is only a false rumour; and finally when the 'beauty' of his corpse is described not once but twice (4.3.35, 39), highlighting its youthful femininity—reinforces his importance less as a political actor or potential king than as a potential object of mourning. Mourning is of course the form of speech repeatedly and insistently associated throughout the play with Constance, his mother, who feelingly and tellingly describes her son as the embodiment of loss (3.4.94ff). He cannot enter into manhood and thus into masculine history; he is rather replaced, in Constance's own telling, with a mannequin that 'Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words […s]tuffs out his vacant garments with his form' (3.4.95-7), and is made of feminised grief itself.

The Boy of *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* is a particularly stark example of feminised exclusion from the historical record, with no name to be memorialised; though he may be the same character as the page Robin in *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* he remains resolutely nameless in the two history plays in which he appears. Like his master Falstaff, he blurs class boundaries: introduced as a 'gift' from the Prince, and thus implied to be a page of sufficient rank to serve a gentleman, by *Henry V* that supposed background has been forgotten. He instead becomes associated with Falstaff's lower-class companions, who seek to make him 'as familiar with men's pockets as their gloves or handkerchiefs' (3.2.45). His description of his companions as 'swashers' and 'villains' exemplifies the tendency to articulate '[d]istinctions between normative and deviant forms of manhood […] in the most hostile terms […] that also influenced the distribution of patriarchal dividends in favor of the married, the middle-aged, the householders, the English, the white, and increasingly the

middling sorts and elites'.[46] Though Alexandra Shepard argues that the scope of 'deviant' forms of masculinity was vast, and that manhood in the period cannot be compressed to one distinct code of ideals, the Boy's personal standards of correct behaviour are more precise.[47] In his telling—'three such antics do not amount to a man' (3.2.30)—the men with whom he is most insistently associated are those whose class and behaviour places them firmly outside of proper masculinity, and thus outside of proper masculine history. Left behind with 'the boys and the luggage' (4.7.1) the Boy is also decisively severed from the masculine realm of combat, his death in battle figured as a stark violation of 'the law of arms' (4.7.2). By the end of the same scene, however, he has been entirely forgotten, absorbed as one of 'none else of name' on Henry's list of casualties (4.8.103). Rendered nameless by his class and age, having lost his not-quite-male companions (and the only woman in their circle), he has no one to speak for the corner of unnamed, undocumented history they all once inhabited.

For both Prince Edward of Lancaster and his father Henry VI, reclamation of their masculine role is only possible because of the women who speak for them and bear their legacy. At the end of *Richard III*, their memories and the Lancastrian cause are passed to Richmond, confirming its endurance not in histories told by women, but those carried, shaped, and documented by men. The women, however, provide an essential intermediate step. Therefore, Richard III's consistent antagonism towards women is an essential aspect of his downfall both in plot terms, and in terms of his historical legacy. Some critics have argued in favour of reading Richard himself as effeminate, including Katherine Eggert, who compares Richard's unruly theatricality to that of Joan in *1 Henry VI* and argues that 'Richard willfully integrates feminine theatrical method, in all its sexual bewitchment, into his own modus operandi'.[48] But where Eggert reads unruly feminine disruption, Ralf Hertel argues

[46] Shepard, p. 294.
[47] See note 9.
[48] Eggert, p. 71.

that 'Richard embod[ies] a Machiavellian self-empowerment which is gendered specifically male'.[49] These arguments recall the distinction between feminine language and structural effeminacy established in relation to Henry V, discussed above: while Richard's personal characteristics and use of language may indeed be feminine in the terms that Eggert suggests, what Hertel describes as his 'self-empowerment' is unquestionably masculine in terms of its structural and political influence. Richard indelibly shapes the arc of the play itself, and it requires supernatural intervention to break his control over his role within it. Moreover, his complete immersion in and power over the present means that he lacks the feminine perspective on the past and future. He consistently dismisses the prophecies that he hears and unlike his victims, has no closing moment of clarity. Because he has killed his wife and been repudiated by his mother for his fratricide, he will have no women to carry his legacy forward into the future.

The position of women as bearers of men's history thus becomes central to the history play's concerns: fear of consignment to feminine history on the one hand, and the potential for vindication after death through memorialisation by women on the other. While the degree of danger associated with effeminacy varies between the first and second tetralogies, what remains consistent is the marginal position assumed by men who behave effeminately—and the potential that they, like women, can access unique power by virtue of their placement outside of masculine history.

[49] Hertel, p. 209.

CHAPTER FIVE | Modern History: The Past in the Present

In 2008, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival announced a new play commissioning program called 'American Revolutions'. Its stated aim was to create a canon of American history plays inspired by and consciously modelled on Shakespeare's English histories, with a target of commissioning 37 plays, to match the number in Shakespeare's generally accepted canon.[1] Another goal was to 'bring many perspectives to the fore', working with American writers from a variety of geographic and cultural backgrounds, who in turn would write in a variety of styles.[2] However, the first play from the cycle to find national success was a fairly straightforward historical drama: Robert Schenkkan's *All The Way,* the first half of what ultimately became a two-part play about President Lyndon B. Johnson. *All The Way* transferred to Broadway in 2014 and was adapted by HBO for television in 2016 (the sequel was intended to come to Broadway in 2020). As Lidialyle Gibson writes in a profile of the American Revolutions' director, Alison Carey,

> the play is consciously Shakespearean: a grand-scale narrative of leadership and crisis, with LBJ at the center as a flawed, charismatic protagonist, plotting and battling and spouting soliloquies. Schenkkan followed up that American Revolutions project with a sequel, [*The*] *Great Society*. It chronicles the hero's moral downfall as the country descended into Vietnam and racial conflict, and his dreams of ending poverty evaporated. 'Robert had to get the rest of the story out,' Carey says, 'the triumph and the tragedy.' That's Shakespearean too.

Gibson and Carey's vision of a 'Shakespearean' narrative is one centred on a single powerful man who undergoes a political and personal rise and fall—triumph and tragedy, as Carey puts it. This is an understanding of the standard Shakespearean historical dramaturgy that is mirrored in our culture broadly, as discussed in Chapter 1.

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[1] Julie Felise Dubiner and Hailey Bachrach, 'The Oregon Shakespeare Festival is Starting New "American Revolutions,"' *Extended Play,* 8 August 2016 <http://extendedplay.thecivilians.org/the-oregon-shakespeare-festival-is-starting-new-american-revolutions-80816/>.
[2] Lidialyle Gibson, 'Bards of America,' *Harvard Magazine,* September-October 2017 <https://harvardmagazine.com/2017/09/american-history-plays>.

Both *All The Way* and *The Great Society* are also stereotypically 'Shakespearean' in the roles they provide for women: *All The Way* includes two named female characters, played by a single actor; *The Great Society* features three named female characters, all wives of male politicians. 'Let your mind wander', *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley wrote of *All The Way*'s Broadway production, 'and you might miss the brief appearances of [Johnson's wife] Lady Bird Johnson (Betsy Aidem), who is mostly depicted graciously enduring Johnson's petulant outbursts when things appear to be going against him'.[3] Part of the play's 'Shakespearean' nature is its marginalisation of female characters, relegated to 'brief appearances' of emotional support for their husbands. *All The Way* thus reflects the enduring influence of Shakespeare's dramaturgy and our assumptions about it on the ways anglophone writers dramatise their nations' histories.

Later American Revolutions commissions have focused more deliberately on women's stories, including Pulitzer Prize winner and Tony Award nominee *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage and Tony Award nominee *Indecent* by Paula Vogel, but neither these nor other high-profile commissions have attracted the same 'Shakespearean' descriptors. London theatre critic Dominic Cavendish, wondering in *The Telegraph* in early 2020 'Are we living in the golden age of the history play?', confined his assessment of the bounty of new historical dramas to those similarly recognisably 'Shakespearean' in form. This was most telling in his very brief account of post-war histories, which takes in Tom Stoppard, Christopher Fry, Howard Brenton and includes Timberlake Wertenbaker as its single example of a female writer, but references none of the experiments in historical feminist dramaturgy undertaken by, for example, these writers' contemporary Caryl Churchill.[4]

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[3] Ben Brantley, 'Review: Brian Cranston Shines as Lyndon Johnson in "All The Way,"' *New York Times,* 19 May 2016 < https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/20/arts/television/review-bryan-cranston-shines-as-lyndon-johnson-in-all-the-way.html>.

[4] Dominic Cavendish, 'Are we living in the golden age of the history play?', *Telegraph,* 3 January 2020 < https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/living-golden-age-history-play/>.

Cavendish alludes to several female writers by the time he begins listing plays from the twenty-first century, but the lack of formal experimentation reflected in his brief survey partly reflects the fact that the urge to reimagine the perceived relationship between women and Shakespeare, particularly in Shakespeare's histories, is most frequently expressed through casting. Companies now regularly cast women in prominent male roles (or in all of the roles) in order to undermine the popular sentiment that, as Phyllida Lloyd said of her acclaimed production of *Henry IV* at London's Donmar Warehouse, the history plays are 'by boys, about boys, on the whole for boys to act'.[5] This chapter, however, will explore how recent playwrights have engaged with a Shakespearean sense of history through their new writing. The female playwrights (and in one case a collaborative performance collective creating an all-female production) discussed here engage directly with the spectre of Shakespearean history-telling, revising his historical dramaturgy in order to create more space for women's voices.

In her survey of feminist history plays from 1976 to 2010, Katherine E. Kelly explores plays that find 'expressions of a felt need to re-imagine women's past lives as a first step towards living a more just present and future'.[6] These expressions take a range of forms, many bearing little resemblance to the 'traditional' historical dramaturgy rooted in Shakespeare. In this chapter, however, I will explore plays that explicitly investigate the Shakespearean roots of the history play genre. Neither direct adaptations of nor literal responses to Shakespeare's plays, these pieces are best understood as what Allison Machlis Meyer calls '*not* Shakespeare': 'appropriations that are intentionally relocated' away from a

[5] 'Phyllida Lloyd, Dame Harriet Walter, and Michael Morpurgo,' *Arts Show with Claudia Winkleman,* BBC Radio 2, 17 October 2014.
[6] Katherine E. Kelly, 'Making the Bones Sing: The Feminist History Play, 1976–2010,' *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the Twenty-First Century,* ed. by Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 645.

Shakespearean reference point.[7] Meyer takes as an example novelist Philippa Gregory's *Cousins' War* series, which alludes to Shakespeare's *Richard III* not by replicating, but by deliberately rejecting its interpretation of the eponymous king. Meyer argues that such efforts are double-edged, on the one hand acting as 'historical recovery' and defiance of the 'dangers woman-centered fiction poses for "proper" historical accounting' in the eyes of patriarchal academic and popular history, but on the other hand, reinforcing the 'masculine and elitist conception of the Bard and of Renaissance history' as a sphere in which women have no place.[8] As this thesis has argued, this sense of absence, though dominant, is inaccurate.

As the first chapter broke down such assumptions about the roles for women in Shakespeare's histories along four axes—historical accuracy, emotion, nationhood, and theatricality—this final chapter will return to these categories. Each section of this chapter will explore how the plays under consideration in this section deal with the specific imaginative and historiographical opportunities provided by the medium of theatre. The chapter will use the lens of the remaining three categories to explore how three recent new works—*Emilia* by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, *It's True, It's True, It's True* by Breach Theatre, and *The James Plays* trilogy by Rona Munro—reflect and contest popular assumptions about the role of women in a tradition of historical drama that has been inescapably shaped by Shakespeare's influence.

Accuracy and *Emilia*

Just over fifty pages of the printed text of *Emilia* is a reprinting of the central poems from the titular Aemilia Lanyer's work *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,* printed in 1611 and often called

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[7] Allison Machlis Meyer, '"Accidental" Erasure: Relocating Shakespeare's Women in Philippa Gregory's *The Cousins' War* Series' in *Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare,* ed. by Christy Desmet, Natalie Loper, and Jim Casey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 259-274, p. 260.
[8] Meyer, pp. 262, 260.

the first collection of original published poetry by an Englishwoman—though this is not accurate.[9] The play text was released in conjunction with the play's 2018 premier at Shakespeare's Globe, while a new version was printed to accompany the production's 2019 West End run; both include Lanyer's poetry after the text of the play itself. In the 2018 edition, the poems are presented without annotation or any commentary save an introduction from Lloyd Malcolm, in which she explains the decision to include the poetry in this format: she and her collaborators read the oft-quoted excerpts about Lanyer from Simon Forman's diaries, in which he writes that 'she is or will be a harlot' and that '[s]he was a whore and dealt evil with him after'.[10] Lloyd Malcolm explains that she and her collaborators 'were pretty angry that his words have come to be so important in the retelling of her story for so many […] the more recent publication of [Lanyer's poetry] by A. L. Rowse unfortunately includes a lot of what Simon Forman said about her in the introduction. I wanted to re-publish her poems with the play to hopefully give them exposure through a different lens'.[11] While Lloyd Malcolm acknowledges that Forman's diary is 'a valuable document and if it didn't exist perhaps we would not know anything at all about Emilia', she also finds it 'unfortunate' that a scholarly edition of the poems includes reference to the only contemporary description of Lanyer herself.[12] This tension encapsulates what I argue is the driving desire of *Emilia*: unmediated access to the past; specifically, a lost feminist heritage that patriarchal history has disrupted.

Lloyd Malcolm reiterates repeatedly in her paratexts that her play is not history or even biography. In her preface to the poems, she is careful to delineate that she is not speaking as or for the historical Aemilia Lanyer, but rather that '*[o]ur version* of Emilia knew that if she

[9] Wendy Wall, 'Isabella Whitney and the Female Legacy,' *ELH*, 58.1 (1991), pp. 35-62.
[10] Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, 'Introduction to the Poems' in *Emilia* (London: Oberon, 2018), p. 105.
[11] Lloyd Malcolm, p. 105.
[12] Lloyd Malcolm, pp. 104-5.

was going to be remembered she needed to publish her poems' (emphasis mine).[13] However, this insistence that her Emilia is not the historical Aemilia Lanyer, and is not trying to be, sits in fascinating contrast with the production's statements—partly given voice by Lloyd Malcolm, but also by marketing materials presumably outside of her control—that the play's aim is to revive Aemilia Lanyer's legacy, to grant access to the feminist heritage described above. The text, for example, on the back of the play reads, 'Her Story has been erased by History […] this world premier will reveal the life of Emilia: poet, mother and feminist. This time, the focus will be on this exceptional woman who managed to outlive all the men the history books tethered her to'. The 'unfortunate' historical record can be swept aside. Imagination becomes a tool to reveal, as the cover states, that which traditional history has effaced.

The plays discussed in this thesis thus far, particularly the historical comedies, defy historical accuracy in favour of fiction in order to introduce subplots that are simultaneously comic and symbolic, as fictional women often come to represent the English nation itself (see Chapter 1). Lloyd Malcolm, on the other hand, insists upon Emilia's centrality to her own narrative, using fiction to imagine a life lived between the gaps in the historical record. But Lloyd Malcolm's use of anachronism is just one aspect of an antagonistic position not only towards the idea of historical accuracy, but to the historical and literary scholarship that underpins it. Through this antagonistic relationship, Lloyd Malcolm's play proposes that anachronism is the only means for feminist engagement with historical subjects. This recalls Elizabeth Freeman's proposal of a 'queerly inflected consciousness' that allows a construction of collective histories of marginalised identities 'that can hold deconstructionism and historical materialism in productive tension'.[14] It is precisely this tension I wish to

[13] Lloyd Malcolm, p. 105.
[14] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p.12.

explore, as Lloyd Malcolm's desire to create a recognisable and relatable history of female creativity leads to the perhaps inadvertent assertion that socially constructed categories such as 'woman', 'foreign', and 'Black' are in fact immutable and timeless.

Lloyd Malcolm's playful relationship with conventional historical narratives is made clear in the play's opening moments, when Emilia3 (the eldest of the three characters who embody Emilia at different ages, one acting out scenes while the other two narrate and comment) opens by reading from what the stage directions indicate should be a copy of A. L. Rowse's *Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age: Simon Forman the Astrologer.* The text Emilia3 reads is identified in dialogue as an extract from Forman, but the stage directions make explicit that it is also a quotation from Rowse (1).[15] Lloyd Malcolm's deliberate inclusion of Rowse, not just Forman, as source points to the play's dual position as a retort to the sexist early modern society that obscured Lanyer's accomplishments and to what the play frames as the inescapably sexist historical work that is based on the documents of that society. It is also an early and explicit anachronistic gesture, one emphasised in the original Globe production by the subsequent appearance of Emilia's Muses, an ensemble dressed all in white, twenty-first century clothing. The production likewise drew upon what the script describes as 'Renaissance instruments and contemporary beats' (vii) in a dance sequence in Scene 2 that opens with the Countess of Kent demanding, 'Are you ready to SLAY?'. '*Think Renaissance girl group,'* the stage directions instruct, '*En Vogue. Beyonce* [sic]*'* (12).

Subtler and more consistent, however, is deliberate anachronism in structure and style, usually intended to draw a direct line between the gendered and racial discrimination that Emilia faces and the sexism and racism of the present. Emilia's first encounter with the other young women of the court exemplifies this tendency:

> LADY KATHERINE: Speaking of breeding— what's yours?
> EMILIA1: Pardon?

[15] Citations for this and subsequent plays of this chapter will appear in-text.

> LADY KATHERINE: Where are you from?
> EMILIA1: London.
> LADY KATHERINE: No. Where. Are. You. From?
> EMILIA1: I. Am. From. London.
> LADY KATHERINE: But you don't look like us.
> EMILIA1: Is this your first time in London? […] My family hark from over the sea…
> LADY KATHERINE: I knew it! My father said that we were being inundated by families like yours. Fleeing wars, men migrating for work. Craftsmen are furious. Coming over here to take their work. That's what they're saying. That's who you are. Too many. Too many of you coming over. It's a real problem, that's what my father said (11-2).

The invocation of both a familiar racial microaggression in Lady Katherine's stubborn disbelief that Emilia is really English and the language of Brexit-inflected anti-immigrant sentiment situate Emilia as the subject of recurrent prejudices. The sixteenth century saw serious and sometimes violent xenophobic prejudice, as Shakespeare's contributions to *Sir Thomas More* famously dramatise. However, the conflation of early modern xenophobia with the racist terms of contemporary debates about immigration and refugees creates an anachronistic temporal overlap between the two eras, rendering Emilia's race, her father's nationality, and English xenophobia transhistorical—and thus, topics that can be fully understood without mediation by a historian.

Lanyer's published poetry, what Lloyd Malcolm describes as the period's only pathway to 'make a mark and be remembered',[16] naturally becomes an important site for this struggle for unmediated access to the past and the desire to insist upon the timeless universality of female experience and ambition. As Lloyd Malcolm notes in her preface to Lanyer's poetry, she was introduced to Lanyer partly as 'a woman forgotten by history who was one of the best cases for being the 'Dark Lady of The Sonnets' and therefore potentially Shakespeare's lover' as well as being 'a woman who was a talented writer herself'.[17] Historians would contest this assumption: Pamela Benson describes A. L. Rowse's original

[16] Lloyd Malcolm, p. 105.
[17] Lloyd Malcolm, p. 104.

identification of Lanyer as the Dark Lady as a 'delightful fiction' and finds that Forman's casebooks, which detail Lanyer's sexual history, do not 'provide any evidence whatsoever of a connection between Emilia and Shakespeare; [Rowse's] theory is almost universally rejected'.[18] Lloyd Malcolm does not reject it, however, and Emilia's dual identity as muse and artist, and the tension between the two, becomes a driving subplot of the middle portion of the play.

Once again, Lloyd Malcolm tackles historical and contemporary precedents simultaneously in her treatment of Emilia's literary ambitions, most conspicuously seeming to reference the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love,* written by Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman and directed by John Madden, as a model for the relationship between William Shakespeare and his female muse. *Shakespeare in Love*'s enduring influence on the canon of imaginative engagements with Shakespeare's life can be seen in the similarities between it and the 2017 television series *Will,* created by Craig Peirce for the American network TNT, which likewise depicts the early artistic career of William Shakespeare and ends its first series with a sequence that is startlingly similar to the final scenes of *Shakespeare in Love.* Both film and television series establish a clear model for the relationship between Shakespeare and his female love interest—in both cases, in keeping with the early modern historical comedy style, a woman who is either fully fictional or so heavily fictionalised as to essentially be so. The Shakespeare of *Shakespeare in Love,* played by Joseph Fiennes, is in love with the wealthy Viola (Gwyneth Paltrow), who exits the film on a ship for America with her new husband. Will Shakespeare of *Will,* played by Laurie Davidson, sees his lover Alice Burbage (Olivia DeJonge) likewise depart on a ship for America, having newly converted to Catholicism to

[18] Pamela Benson, 'Emilia Lanier', *A Critical Introduction to the Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634* < https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/using-the-casebooks/meet-the-patients/emilia-lanier >.

support the mission of the priest Robert Southwell, who will apparently escape his actual 1595 death.

Both Shakespeares turn to writing to mourn their losses: Fiennes's Shakespeare sits down to begin *Twelfth Night,* immortalising his lost love as 'my heroine for all time'. In *Will,* Alice's contributions throughout the series to scraps of the work-in-progress recognisable as *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that she will become the inspiration for that doomed heroine. For both women, to be subsumed into Shakespeare's mythology is framed as a bittersweet triumph. Viola bids Shakespeare not farewell, but 'Write me well'. They may not be leading the lives they wanted, but at least they will be immortalised. In order to enter the story of Shakespeare as we know it, these women must first leave it, making room for their actual selves to be replaced by their fictionalised ones. We recognise them in their moment of departure; she was *that* Viola all along. Both film and TV show end with Shakespeare on the cusp of creating a play we, the audience, know will be great: his beginning as *Shakespeare* is the women's end.

Emilia seems to subvert this strategy. *Will* also features Aemilia Lanyer as a character, and she functions much like Alice does: suggesting lines and plots for Shakespeare to use freely, despite being a writer herself. But Lloyd Malcolm's play instead draws the logical historiographical conclusion from these Shakespeare origin stories: if writing is the way to enter history, to invisibly contribute to Shakespeare's plays must be read not as empowering, but rather as the ultimate form of historical exclusion. The Hollywood film version of *Emilia* would surely end with Shakespeare writing Emilia into his work after they part ways, but Lloyd Malcolm refuses to frame Emilia's potential absorption into Shakespeare's legacy as either a positive, or as the end of her story.

Midway through the play, Lloyd Malcolm's Emilia goes to the theatre having recently ended her relationship with Shakespeare after the death in infancy of their illegitimate child.

In their first meeting, Emilia and Shakespeare woo each other with sparring lines from the yet-to-be-written *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Love's Labours Lost,* a play she then helps him name before advising its famous ending: 'Make sure there is resistance from the women. I want there to be one who does not wish to marry' (34-6, 39). When she arrives at the playhouse, she finds a performance of *Othello,* and is horrified to find her words in the mouth of the fictional Emilia, who, though *Emilia'*s cast is designated as all female, is established as a boy playing a woman: 'He wishes me silent. To watch his display. But these [words] are mine, why can't I keep them?' In defiance of the docile exits of the other Wills' lovers, she leaps onto the stage and recites her words along with the fictional Emilia, chasing the boy player from the stage until she herself is dragged away (58-9). What might be the ending of *Will* or *Shakespeare in Love* is only the end of Lloyd Malcolm's first act. The second act is dedicated to Emilia's discovery of her own voice as a writer, first by circulating manuscript poetry amongst the wives of aristocrats, then by publishing and distributing her own work thanks to a network of both upper and lower class women.

But what the play frames as a feminist reclamation of patriarchal literary history becomes more troubling when considered in light of Emilia Lanyer's own writing, which the play barely depicts. The longest single quotation from her actual work comes from her prefatory poem 'To The Virtuous Reader', which is also quoted on the back of the playtext: 'Men, who forgetting they were born of women, nourished of women, and if they were not of the means of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the world, and a final end of them all; do like vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred'. The appeal of this apparently uncomplicated feminist statement to a contemporary writer and audience is clear. The play also quotes ten lines from the 52-line 'A Description of Cooke-ham' (93) and seven lines from the 91-line 'To All Virtuous Ladies in General' (95), though many of these are isolated snippets rather than extended and contextualised quotations. In an early scene, the

child Emilia1 also recites eight lines from 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' (5), the only quotation of the poem from which her collection of verse takes its title. This title is never spoken—indeed, it is actively erased from the early moments of the play, when Emilia3 recites Lanyer's message 'To the doubtful Reader' in defence of the poem's somewhat blasphemous title, replacing Lanyer's with Lloyd Malcolm's own: 'If you desire to be resolved, why I give this title, 'Emilia', know for certain that it was delivered to me in sleep many years before I had any intent to write in this manner and was quite out of my memory, until I had written this script' (1-2). However, as the existence of this defence itself suggests, Lanyer's title is an essential part of the radicalism of her poetic project, and to erase it is to ignore the work for which she is famous.

'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' itself is a retelling of Biblical narratives, primarily the crucifixion of Jesus, that centres and insists upon the importance of women, including a defence of Eve and a depiction of Pilate's wife attempting to dissuade her husband from condemning Jesus to death. The form of proto-feminist redemption that Lanyer depicts is one that resonates remarkably well with the Shakespearean historical narratives discussed in this thesis. As John Rodgers writes, in the aftermath of Lanyer's depiction of the crucifixion, '[t]he entire category of verbal action—in fact, a category that the poem had labored to derogate as both Hebraic and feminine—is redeemed, implicitly redeeming the verbal agency of this woman of Jewish descent […] Emilia Lanyer'.[19] This startlingly contemporary-sounding revisionist narrative was nominally participating in a lengthy tradition of devotional poetry that Lanyer seeks to invoke at various points in the poem, as discussed below. However, Lanyer's decision to publish combined with the audacity of her subject matter affirms to a certain extent Lloyd Malcolm's sense of Lanyer's singularity. Rodgers describes

[19] John Rodgers, 'The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition: Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,'' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63 (2000), 435-46, p. 441.

the title of the work itself—quoting the sarcastic salutation of a Roman soldier to Jesus—as 'astonishing', a symbol of Lanyer's '[s]hedding any affiliation with the resigned femininity of her text's Christ and appropriating the activity of poetic work'.[20] From the poem's title onwards, Lanyer's feminism is inseparable from her choice of religious subject, meaning the precise nature of her radicalism is obscure without sufficient understanding of her cultural and especially her religious context.

Lloyd Malcolm's location of an explicitly feminist impulse in Lanyer's work is not itself anachronistic, as Janel Mueller describes

> Lanyer proves every bit our contemporary in her resolve to locate and articulate transformative possibilities in gender relations that will bear their own urgent imperatives for enactment. For this purpose, which is to say, oddly from a contemporary point of view, she looks to the figure of Christ in history […] as she reads the record of Scripture with wholly unconventional eyes.[21]

Suzanne Trill highlights the fact that while 'most modern forms of Western Christianity are currently subject to a right-wing agenda […i]n Lanyer's case, faith does not preclude feminism; rather, her feminism is facilitated by her faith'.[22] Both Trill and Mueller allude to a perceived disjunction between contemporary feminism and religious faith, one that is mirrored in Lloyd Malcolm's distinct avoidance of religion despite the fact that this makes any serious discussion or depiction of Lanyer's actual work impossible. But Lloyd Malcolm seems to see the unity of faith and feminism as equally impossible.[23] While much of her introduction maintains a careful separation between her Emilia and the historical Lanyer, the distinction collapses on the topic of religious poetry: 'she knew that to be published as a

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[20] Rodgers, pp. 445-6.
[21] Janel Mueller, 'The Feminist Poetics of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum'* in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. by Marshall Grossman (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 99-127, p. 101.
[22] Suzanne Trill, 'Feminism versus Religion: Towards a Re-Reading of Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,' *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 25.4 (2001), 67-80, p. 76.
[23] This also forcefully erases Lanyer's potential Jewish identity—one that, as Rodgers' reading suggests, may have been of equal importance to her Biblical revisions as her gender. Instead, the play consigns her possible Judaism to the realm of post-mortem conjecture, pointedly refusing to admit it as one of the marginalised identities the play seeks to reclaim.

woman she needed to get past the censor and write religious poetry and within it she hid messages for her fellow woman'.[24] Lloyd Malcolm's preface frames it as self evident that the poetry's religious content was imposed by outside forces, and that Lanyer's feminist messages are concealed within the religion, rather than dependent upon it.

The decision is depicted in the play in comic terms: 'What can women write? What will get past the censor?' a friend asks. The answer: 'Religious texts' (91). The line, delivered with flat sarcasm in the Globe production, was received with laughter by the audience at the performance I attended. This faintly derisive framing of the content of the poetry justifies its exclusion from the play. Said exclusion combines with the play's copious quotations from Shakespeare to suggest that Lanyer would surely have written like Shakespeare if she could have. Ironically, this reifies Shakespeare, the iconic literary man, as the arbiter of what makes for writing worthy of notice, and reinforces his white, male perspective as fundamentally universal. The failure to give Lanyer's actual writing the same time and space as Shakespeare's means that her greatest creative contribution even within the world of the play is not her own poetry, but her supposed ghostwriting of Shakespeare's. Failure to engage with Lanyer's poetry prevents the play from recognising that both Lloyd Malcolm's play and Lanyer's poem share an interest in restoring admirable women to the historical record, and to recover their reputations from the distortions of patriarchal history—in Lanyer's case, specifically Biblical history. But this requires complicated and nuanced engagement with Lanyer's religion and culture. Shakespeare's greatness requires no literary or historical context; understanding how Aemilia Lanyer's poetry is simultaneously religious and radical does.

Marketing for the original Globe run drew frequently on images of Charity Wakefield as Shakespeare, emphasising his importance as a symbolic as well as literal antagonist for

[24] Lloyd Malcolm, p. 106.

Emilia's artistic aspirations and mirroring the play's conflicts by centring him in the marketing as the more recognisable and appealing figure, played by the actor who was, at the time, the most famous in the company. A scene between Shakespeare and Emilia3 concludes the play, in which he enters to complain that '[t]his is my gaff' (98), a line that once more traversed past and present when spoken on the stage of the reconstructed Globe. 'Not today it isn't,' Emilia replies, and in defiance of the ending of the first act, she takes the stage to deliver a rousing final speech, urging the women of the audience to 'burn the whole fucking house down' (100). Her reclamation and destruction of Shakespeare's work, reputation, and famous stage itself form the play's climax of triumphant fury. However, this fury is underpinned narratively by further creative anachronism that erases rather than recovers the feminist literary history she is urging the women of the audience to remember or create.

A key case in point is the play's treatment of Mary Sidney, to whom the real Lanyer dedicated one of her more extravagant dedicatory verses.[25] Lloyd Malcolm's Sidney appears only once, and is simultaneously artistically encouraging and threateningly sexual, the latter trait disrupting her potential presence as a mentor for Emilia and instead pushing Emilia to the patronage of Lady Margaret Clifford. As Kate Chedgzoy writes, in Lanyer's poetry, Mary Sidney is a key link in the chain of female literary heritage that Lanyer strives to create in her dedicatory verses.[26] Lloyd Malcolm instead isolates Emilia from her poetic forebears, complexly figuring Sidney as both inspiration— 'I desire my poems will be published,' she says. 'And I will see that they are. You, Emilia Bassano, will one day do the same' (22)—and threat: Lady Margaret warns Emilia to 'beware the ones who appear as ally but play to the same tune as the enemy' (23).

[25] Kate Chedzgoy, 'Remembering Aemilia Lanyer,' *Journal of the Northern Renaissance,* 2 (2010) <http://www.northernrenaissance.org/remembering-aemilia-lanyer/>, p. 8.
[26] Chedzgoy, p. 10.

Coming on the heels of a series of insinuations about Sidney's sexual aims—'I had hoped to speak to [Emilia] about a position but I see you were already attempting to get her into one ahead of me,' Lady Margaret says, and accuses Sidney of 'prey[ing] on a young lady's naivete' and 'consider[ing Emilia] a mere object of desire' (22-3)—the implication seems to be that Sidney, like Shakespeare (who Emilia first encounters in Sidney's company) views Emilia only as sexual object and potential muse. It is difficult to discern any other meaning behind Lady Margaret's warning about 'the ones who appear as ally', a statement that Lloyd Malcolm underlines with the help of the narrating Emilias: 'Stop. This. This here. Listen. […] That. *She smiles at the memory*' (23). In proposing and then rejecting Sidney as a mentor, Lloyd Malcolm seems to explicitly reject the notion that Emilia is indebted to any previous artistic tradition. Sidney is the 'enemy', despite her words of encouragement, and her planting of the seed of the possibility of publication—the goal that Emilia carries for the remainder of the play—is never acknowledged as originating in Sidney's advice.

Aemilia Lanyer's poetry attempts to construct a female literary heritage in order to legitimise her artistic efforts.[27] Lloyd Malcolm disrupts this effort in favour of constructing a community of women who will support Emilia's creative endeavours but never seriously attempt their own. This framing of Emilia's work suggests a distinctly modern insistence on individual artistic brilliance over collaboration or collectivity, and a demand for exceptionalism that particularly characterises contemporary depictions of historical female characters. We see this tendency in the previously discussed Shakespearean biopics, where Alice and Viola likewise display their feminist credentials not only by being more talented and open-minded than any other women they encounter, but also in their uniquely clear-eyed awareness of the absurdity and injustice of their society's demands to be married, silent, and obedient. These characters' extraordinary status renders them incapable of integration into

[27] Chedzgoy, pp. 8-11.

the broader stream of history, one that in actuality featured networks and communities of women who staged the forms of resistance that these works frame as impossibly unique: women who took a keen interest in the arts, published or privately disseminated their own writing, and worked in the playhouses.[28] It is a tendency inextricably tied to Emilia Lanyer's re-entry into the literary canon, which was facilitated in large part by Rowse's identification of her as Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady'. As Lloyd Malcolm's introduction to her under those terms demonstrates, she has not escaped this association despite the scholarly consensus that the identification is incorrect.

The appeal of justifying Emilia's importance because of her unique and mysterious connection to Shakespeare mirrors the demand that a popular historical heroine be extraordinary and highly individual, resulting in creative anachronism that elevates the heroine at the expense of the women who would surround her in her full historical context, once more excusing writer and viewer from the need to delve into the complexities of that context. Lloyd Malcolm's Sidney exemplifies this contradiction, as a woman that the real Lanyer sought as a patron in terms that emphasised their shared positions in a single literary culture is instead transformed into a predator, explicitly identified as an 'enemy'.

Lloyd Malcolm imagines a different, largely fictional literary community for Emilia, one that more readily reflects contemporary desires for intersectional feminist class relations. Emilia's engagement with and employment of a group of lower-class 'Bankside women' recalls the way early modern historical comedies turn to fiction to access lower-class and female voices left out of the historical record; it also mirrors the use of such characters to teach the historical, aristocratic (or, in the case of Emilia, aristocratic-adjacent) protagonist a moral lesson. The Bankside women help Emilia publish and distribute her poetry in

[28] Natasha Korda, *Labor's Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

manuscript and printed form, until one of the women is arrested for distributing pamphlets: 'They found her with some, and said it was the devil's work. […] Her trial was yesterday, they burn her tonight… They're burning her for what we did' (97). This incident brings the play to an abrupt end, as Emilia3 laments, 'What I did. This is what happens when we speak. When we do not cut out our tongues. When we do not stay silent. This is what they do. This is what they did' (97).

The image of their friend's burning at the stake feeds the closing monologue's imagery of fire, a vivid symbol of patriarchal violence, repression, and injustice throughout history, emphasised by the factual-sounding conclusion 'This is what they did'. In these terms, it hardly matters that the idea of burning a woman at the stake for distributing pamphlets of poetry is wildly inaccurate. However, as with Mary Sidney, it is an inaccuracy that obscures the actual work of women in the early modern period, including the many women who worked as printers and booksellers, again replacing a nuanced historical vision with easily accessible, visceral stereotype.

It is in this closing moment that the play's dual aims—to recover the voices of historical women and to use an imagined past to galvanise a feminist present—come into most direct conflict. To imagine an Emilia utterly crushed by violent patriarchy whose voice can only be recovered in the more-empowered present, the realities of her own life and the lives of women surrounding her must be erased. Any effort to recover the real Lanyer's voice or culture gives way to more readily accessible fiction, beginning with the neglect of her poetry and culminating in a version of early modern England where the penalty for being a woman found with a pamphlet is death. In this closing image, we see the fruits of the generations of patriarchal scholarship that Lloyd Malcolm and her collaborators place themselves in opposition to: an understanding of the past that entirely erases the legitimate literary and publishing work of women. The irony of *Emilia*'s rejection of historical or

literary study is that feminist scholars have laboured for decades now in service of precisely Lloyd Malcolm's goal: to restore the work of women to the historical record.

Emotion and *It's True, It's True, It's True*

In performance, there is no obvious connection between Shakespeare's history plays and the work of Breach Theatre, the collaborative performance company that created the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe hit *It's True, It's True, It's True,* which transferred to London and toured the UK before being filmed for BBC4. The hour-long play performed by a cast of four women depicts the legal battle of seventeenth century Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi, who brought her former teacher Agostino Tassi to trial for rape. And yet, Shakespeare's is the first famous name referenced in the play text, though unspoken, in the opening stage direction: '*The cast enter purposefully in single file, then perform a slowed-down, distorted jig, the kind seen in traditional Shakespeare performances'* (2). Though neither his name nor his works are ever specifically referenced in the play, this stage direction makes clear that Shakespeare's model of historical drama is present as an influence.

In the preface to the printed text, the creators grapple with the question of 'where documented history ends and our own imagination begins'. One key intervention in this question is to 'dramatise Gentileschi's paintings as their own form of "evidence"' (i). This integration of art into legal evidence reflects a particularly contemporary understanding of the relationship between personal experience and artistic expression—and in turn becomes fundamental to *It's True, It's True, It's True*'s perspective on the place of personal experience—specifically, personal emotional experience—in the narration of Artemisia Gentileschi's artistic work and trial. In the opening stage direction, Shakespeare is positioned as a symbol of the kind of 'traditional' historical narrative that Breach seek to 'distort' and disrupt: a model that demands the stark division, articulated by both their preface and by the

play's male characters, between emotion and fact in narrating history. As previous chapters have indicated, the sense that emotion—particularly female emotion—is a disruptive, distorting presence is one echoed by historical and contemporary critics of Shakespeare's history plays, but is an assumption that is not upheld by the content or structure of the plays themselves. However, Breach's use of Shakespeare as shorthand for traditional historical narrative suggests the extent to which this reputation, rather than the realities of the plays' contents, have shaped contemporary understandings of how a history play traditionally has, and or perhaps even should, work. *It's True, It's True, It's True* actively seeks to reject this stereotype, embedding Gentileschi's paintings within the verbatim text of her trial in order to argue for the essential role of emotional experience within history.

The first painting to be admitted into the imagined court record is Gentileschi's 1610 work 'Susanna and the Elders.' The court considers several instances in which Artemisia says Agostino Tassi and his friends followed her home, while her neighbour Tuzia insists that the encounter was not so sinister:

> TUZIA: You know how these young girls are. The power they have—they say they don't like it, but it's flattering, isn't it?
> ARTEMISIA: No, it's not. They were everywhere I went. Look, I painted this—
> TUZIA: Course she did. You have to remember Artemisia was a fifteen-year-old girl. Young, creative, prone to artistic license. Been on the end of it myself.
> ARTEMISIA: Can the court please consider one of my paintings?
> JUDGE: So you want to move onto the alleged theft of one of your artworks?
> ARTEMISIA: No, they stole my Judith and Holofernes. This is my Susanna and the Elders. I painted it around this time because of how I was feeling in all this (9-10).

The Judge is confused by Artemisia's desire to use a painting as concrete proof of her own experiences. The company proceeds to enact and narrate the Biblical story behind the painting, physically recreating rather than displaying a copy of the work itself. The printed text notes that 'the performer playing Artemisia should definitely play Susanna, whereas Judith [the subject of a later painting] could be played by either of the other two' (iii). The

requirement that Artemisia also embody Susanna emphasises the link that Artemisia seeks to draw within the play between her art and her life, bringing her art in as evidence of how the experience of being followed by Tassi and his friends—events that she and Tuzia agree on in terms of the factual details of when, where, and what happened—*felt*. Just like the rape that the trial has been called to adjudicate, the statements of event and fact cannot capture the actual nature of the experience, and that is what Artemisia calls upon her art to represent. The Judge, however, fails to understand why 'an iconic image… painted by many' has anything to do with Artemisia's case in particular.

The Judge's misunderstanding mirrors Tuzia's misinterpretation of Tassi's stalking, and Artemisia attempts to clarify that 'it's not just about the story, is it? It's about how you choose it paint it, what you make it say. Mine's completely different from the others' (14). What Tuzia dismisses as 'artistic license' is, in Artemisia's telling, the most important part of the work, the feature that makes it both artistically unique and vital to the trial: the role of the painter within the painting. In Breach's case, it is an invisible presence made literal by the insistence in the script that the actor playing Artemisia also portray Susanna.

There are, Artemisia argues, two forms of truth at work in her painting: the truth of her feelings about Tassi's stalking, and thus the truth of that experience; and artistic truth about what the Biblical Susanna's experience of parallel events would have been. These two forms of truth reinforce one another. Artemisia complains that contemporary painter Alessandro Allori's Susanna appears to encourage the elders, and proceeds to depict the Allori version of 'Susanna and the Elders' *'more like a woman in a shampoo advert […] THE ELDERS begin to chase SUSANNA around the theatre, Benny Hill-style'* (15). The silly, slapstick depiction of Allori's 'Susanna'—which, unlike Gentileschi's, is never actually re-enacted, only mocked—transitions into the more realistic pursuit of Artemisia by Tassi and his friend, '*THE ELDERS remov[ing] their beards and cloaks to become TASSI and*

COSIMO following ARTEMISIA home from church' (16). Though Tassi and Cosimo echo the joking tone of Allori's Elders, Artemisia's fear—the sincerity of her emotional response, in contrast to the pantomime Susanna of Allori's painting—transforms the nature of the superficially parallel exchange. This underlines the argument that Artemisia makes to the Judge about the relevance of her painting to the trial: 'The point is, in my painting you can clearly see that she doesn't welcome this, and I painted that because I know how it feels to be a woman who is watched, rather than a man who gets off on it!' (14-5). Artemisia argues that only she, a woman who shares Susanna's personal experiences, is able to paint the truth. Artistic truth cannot exist without the invisible truth of the artist's experiences to support and inform it.

Both Artemisia and the Judge allude to a stolen painting, Gentileschi's 'Judith Slaying Holofernes', which is the second artwork discussed in both the play and the trial. The Judge asks Artemisia to describe the painting.

> ARTEMISIA: Okay. So it's huge. Life size. And it's dark, very dark—
> JUDGE: And what does the painting depict?
> ARTEMISIA: …but not a solid darkness, more like an endless space were you imagine things have the potential to emerge. Then from below there are these shards of light, which illuminate three figures (31).

Artemisia continues with this evocative description for nearly half a page before finally saying, 'Oh, because these two women are beheading a man—did I not mention that?' (31). Though the line is comic, it also mirrors the arguments surrounding her description of 'Susanna and the Elders.' What is actually happening in the painting, in Artemisia's telling, is secondary to its mood, what one experiences when looking at it. By describing what the viewer sees as a series of discrete images rather than defining the scene, Artemisia creates an emotional narrative of the painting, allowing the audience space to experience their own reaction based purely on her images, rather than on their knowledge of the events those images are depicting—that is, the Biblical Judith beheading Holofernes with the help of her

maid, Abra. This recalls the pockets of marginalised sympathy that Shakespeare repeatedly creates in his history plays, invitations for the audiences to locate sympathy in unexpected places and to draw their own conclusions.

Once again contemporary male painters come in for critique for the lack of feeling and emotional accuracy in their version of events: 'And yes, everyone's painted it, but no one gets it right. Caravaggio's Judith is so—*meek.* She's got these stick-thin arms, and she looks like she's regretting it before she's even started' (32). Artemisia's return to an oft-painted Biblical scene is, as with 'Susanna and the Elders,' an opportunity to depict both the truth of her own experience and of a Biblical heroine whose feelings have, like Susanna's, been misinterpreted by men. The Judge cuts in: 'So are you saying that this painting is, again, autobiographical?' Artemisia replies, 'I'm saying I was angry after he raped me, yes' (33). Artemisia's reply draws a subtle distinction between autobiography and emotional truth, mirroring the separation between event and feeling in describing her painting.

While Breach notes in their preface they intentionally blur the boundaries between truth and fiction, they do clarify the nature of some changes they have made to documented events, including the fact that '[t]he circumstances and motives behind the theft of Artemisia's painting have […] been altered for narrative clarity' (ii). Historically, Gentileschi's 'Judith Slaying Holofernes' was painted between 1612 and 1613—the earlier being the year of the trial itself—and thus it was not possible for it to have been the painting Tassi allegedly conspired to steal. The unknown painting that Tassi stole did depict Judith, but was painted by Gentileschi's father, Orazio, who painted a version of Judith and Abra's act that looks very similar to Gentileschi's later version.[29] In the play, it is Artemisia's painting that is stolen.

[29] R. Ward Bissell, 'Artemisia Gentileschi: A New Documented Chronology,' *Art Bulletin* 50 (1968), 153-68, p. 155.

Artemisia explains that she intends to model Holofernes after Tassi (26), and Tuzia believes that Tassi and his friends 'stole [the painting] because of its likeness to Agostino, which he was concerned would arouse suspicion' (30). Art historians do think that Gentileschi's Holofernes is modelled after Tassi.[30] But the exchange of Orazio and Artemisia's Judiths as the stolen work and the subsequent transformation of Tassi's motives creates more than pure 'narrative clarity'. Breach's Tassi steals the painting for the same reason that Artemisia wants it entered as evidence: because it reveals the truth of her experience. His fear of the painting's revelatory power reinforces its status as a bearer of truth despite its apparently fictional subject. As noted above, when the Judge describes the painting as 'autobiographical' and Artemisia subtly corrects him, she reflects this distinction between event and emotion: as Tassi recognises, her painting is not about Judith and Holofernes, it is about Artemisia and Agostino. It is, as Artemisia says when describing the painting, about a woman '[t]aking all that rage she has been sitting in for months, and channelling it into action' (32). Events once again come second to emotion when Artemisia describes her future at the end of the play: 'Yes, I was changed. I felt anger. I felt sadness. But I also felt happy, in my life. I put all of these things into my art—because I'm painting my experience' (51). Though she also provides a list of her professional and personal accomplishments, this concluding line implies that her recitation of events cannot capture the entirety of her experience. To understand that, we must not only hear about what she did, but how she felt.

Breach's use of the transcript of Gentileschi's trial itself as the basis for their play text becomes another vehicle for expressing this fascination with the emotional underpinnings of historical fact. Marvin Carlson argues that the tradition of documentary theatre originated in

[30] Jonathan Jones, 'More savage than Caravaggio: the woman who took revenge in oil,' *Guardian,* 5 October 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/05/artemisia-gentileshi-painter-beyond-caravaggio>.

its most influential contemporary form with plays derived from court transcripts. Surveying the history of the form, Carlson points to a mounting tension for artists between the apparently objective source material and the creative manner of its presentation. Dogged at first by accusations of bias despite their claims to straightforward neutrality, in the late twentieth century, theatre artists working with documentary materials increasingly embraced this contradiction, at times combining, like Breach, the real and imagined. As Carlson writes, '[t]he very fact that such "real" material is included, but *not* privileged, is directly in accord with the central poststructuralist concept that *all* reality is filtered through narrative and other structures, and that no text is in itself more transparent or reflective of "true" reality than any other'.[31] Breach's description of their own engagement with their source material largely echoes this philosophy: 'it's now difficult to pinpoint in this play text where documented history ends and our own imaginations begin. "Truth," then, is tricky even before getting to the events disputed by the characters in the play' (i). However, the voice-over that begins the play concludes with the complicated pronouncement, after reciting the practicalities of the setting and the original languages and origin of the text, that '[e]verything that follows is true' (1).

The display and re-enactment of Gentileschi's paintings reveal that Breach do not mean 'true' in the documentary sense that every word spoken onstage is derived from historical documents, but rather that they have exploded documented historical fact in search of a very Shakespearean sense of a broader poetic truth, the kind of truth Artemisia seeks to reveal through the use of her paintings as metaphors for and evidence of her emotional state. Breach points again to the nature of this broader (and, I believe they would argue, deeper) truth when the textual introduction explains that, despite the intentional anachronisms and

[31] Marvin Carlson, *Shattering Hamlet's Mirror: Theatre and Reality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), pp. 25-8.

artistic liberties taken with the trial transcript, 'some passages of that document demanded to be left intact, sacred. Artemisia's account of the rape remains largely unchanged, as does her exchange with Tassi when he was allowed to cross-examine her, and when she was tortured she did indeed repeat the phrase "it is true". It was this voice— already bold, visionary, and uncompromising—that inspired us throughout the making of this show, in a room filled with the rage, tears, laughter and love of a similarly impassioned creative team' (ii). The religiously inflected language of Gentileschi's 'sacred' words and 'visionary' voice point, likely subconsciously, to the same understanding of elevated truth that informs tropological Biblical readings, which see the events of scripture as allegorical descriptions of moral truths. And like the return to Artemisia's emotional experience of her life and career at the end of the play, Breach's description of their creative process is not of intellectual connection to the facts of Artemisia's life, but an emotional response to her voice and vision. Indeed, the script frequently describes only the characters' emotions rather than their actions, in distinct contrast to the emotionless, supposedly objective document from which the story derives. For Breach, it is in filling the emotional gaps left by such dispassionate record-keeping that a richer historical truth is to be found.

Like *Emilia, It's True, It's True, It's True* assigns transhistorical emotional truths to Gentileschi's life and work, explicitly embracing anachronism to convey the timelessness of her experiences of sexual and legal violence. Unlike *Emilia,* Breach Theatre draws upon Gentileschi's art to do so, experimenting not only with the notions of historical accuracy and truth, but using these works to investigate how unrecordable emotional experience can in fact be entered into the documents of historical record, where descriptions of what happened or even what was said are vacated of their original animating emotional force. Despite the text's invocation of Shakespeare as the implied antithesis to the historical work that Breach undertake in this play, the Shakespearean historical dramaturgy is not as distant from

Breach's aims as this opposition suggests. As Chapters 1 and 2 discuss, Shakespeare carves out distinct space for female characters to register their emotional responses to the events of the plays. *It's True, It's True, It's True* is rather a play comprised almost entirely of such moments, as Artemisia continually arrests the progress of the transcribed trial to insist on bringing her feelings and responses to the trial's subject into the proceedings—to force the audience of both judges and real-life spectators to understand the truth of her experience.

Nation and *The James Plays*

Within the first few minutes of *James I: The Key Will Keep The Lock,* in he swaggers: King Henry V, complete with Laurence Olivier bowl cut and red-and-blue surcoat. Over the course of the play, the titular King James I of Scotland is plagued and haunted by Henry, his captor, childhood bully, and perverse mentor in the art of kingship—though Henry himself only appears in one full scene, the first, before dying offstage of dysentery. In that scene, however, he proposes a model of kingship that he pushes a reluctant James to live up to in exchange for being released from English captivity, where he has been prisoner since he was a child, and returned to the Scottish throne. It is a form of rulership much like the play's Henry himself: short-sightedly aggressive, pragmatic, and defined by posturing. In a line from the 2014 National Theatre production that was cut by the time of the 2017 printed edition, Henry succinctly encapsulates what Henrican kingship means: 'You're a King, this is the job. I can't believe you still haven't mastered the basics. You have to fuck women you don't know and execute your relatives'.[32] Deciding, by the end of the scene, that James is unequal to this model, Henry offers some parting advice: 'Keep reminding them that you're ours, you are England' (13). Henry's presence, and this advice, loom over the play as a dare to both James

[32] Royal National Theatre Archive RNT/SM/1/744, *James I* Prompt Script 2014, p. 18.

and to Scottish playwright Rona Munro. Conjuring then ignominiously banishing the ghost of Shakespeare's histories in the form of his most iconic hero-king, in his most iconic garb, Munro proposes a guiding conflict for her trilogy of plays that is structural as well as personal: can James escape Henry's advice and define kingship in his own terms— and can *The James Plays* escape the English, Shakespearean model of national history?

Upon his return to Scotland, James I delivers a three-page speech articulating his vision for his country and his role within it, a speech that is both an explicit defiance of Henry's demands that James I will serve as his 'vassal King' (14) and an implicit rejection of Henry's model of kingship. Henry's first scene opens with a command to kneel, a command that also bookends James I's speech. The two kings' differing tactics to achieve this end exemplify their differences in philosophy. Having captured four Scottish lords in battle—James I's Stewart cousins and a relative of the Douglas family—Henry presents James I to them in what is, as he soon makes clear, a test of James I's leadership abilities. A cousin, called Big James, protests, 'He's no my fucking King!', in response to which Henry issues his command for Big James to kneel.

> *The GUARDS wrestle BIG JAMES to the ground. All their weapons are out, ready to kill* […]
> HENRY: On King James's command, boys, wait for the King of Scotland to speak.
> *Quiet as HENRY talks just to JAMES. BIG JAMES is held, ready for execution.*
> *(To JAMES.)* Show them what the King of Scotland does to traitors (8).

James I's rote recitation of the laws of chivalry in response—'You will be ransomed or you will give service to His Majesty King Henry' (9)—is an obvious disappointment to Henry.

The trio of defiant Stewart brothers (plus the grovelling Douglas of Balvenie) evokes the revelation and punishment of the three traitors in Shakespeare's *Henry V,* a scene where Shakespeare's Henry seems to fulfil what Munro's Henry demands of James by putting on an elaborate performance of entrapment and public punishment. James I and Munro reject

Henry's harshly punitive and performative path, bolstered by language of divine justice, in favour of an appeal to what James I sees as the more just and merciful rule of law and careful cooperation. As he complains to Henry later in the scene, 'I'm not going back to Scotland till we've got a proper plan, a strategy […] We've been in negotiations for years! You just fucked every hour of that, didn't you!?' (16). It is this vision of rule by measured negotiation that James I articulates when he addresses his lords in Scotland, beginning with a command for them to kneel—which is greeted by a '*nasty silence*' and reminder that '[t]hat might be the… English way, Your Majesty, but... […] You're in Scotland now' (42). Rather than enforcing the gesture with the use of guards, or seizing the opportunity for public, symbolic punishment, James I responds with his lengthy speech, intended to 'tell you who I am now' (42). The answer: 'Kneel to me because I promise you, and I will prove to you by everything I do now… I *am* Scotland […] So I'm asking you now… show me how much you love this country' (45). In contrast to the divine rights continually articulated by Shakespeare's kings, Henry V included, James I proposes that a Scottish king is defined by his connection to the land itself.

Unlike Shakespeare's Richard II, who is convinced that '[t]his earth shall have a feeling, and these stones / Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king / shall falter under foul rebellion's arms' and imagines the earth of England itself rising against rebels (*R2* 3.2.24-6), James I proposes an even closer affinity between king and country. Richard sees his power as resting ultimately in God, the land his servant; James I's connection is directly with Scotland as land, as idea, and as a people. Though both Henry and James I's cousins refer to him as 'King of Scotland' (7), James I himself shifts the language to further reflect the cooperative kingship he envisions: 'I'm the King of Scots' (43). In response to this reorienting of the relationship between King and subject, the Scottish lords kneel.

James I's belief in the power of law is articulated in the first scene of the second act, at a meeting of his Parliament: 'While I am King, while *I* am King, the key will keep the lock and the broom brush will keep the cow and no man, *no man*, will stand above that law' (55). Borrowing this phrase as the play's title, Munro emphasises the place of this idea at the heart of James I's vision of monarchy. And yet, this rule of law is precisely what leads him inexorably back towards Henry's model of kingship, even as the structure of the play itself increasingly diverges from a Shakespearean understanding of the relationship between King, country, and history.

The penultimate scene of *James I* builds to a battle between King James I and his cousin Big James. After failing to force the Stewart brothers to observe the rule of law, James I is finally driven to make a deal with the Stewarts' father, his uncle Murdac: with Murdac's support, he will arrest the brothers for their continual defiance with the promise that they will not then be harmed (63-4). Big James escapes and raises an army that James I must engage in battle. As James I fights, he is taunted by the ghost of King Henry, until Henry appears before him on the battlefield and James attacks him: 'You dare! You! I'll show you how to be King! I'll show you! […] *JAMES is still slashing at the fallen man again and again.* You dare stop me doing my work! You fucking stop me! *The battle is over but JAMES is still hacking'* (84). In the original production directed by Laurie Sansom, this sequence became a full duel between James I and Henry, Henry only revealed as nothing more than a figment of James's imagination, another random soldier, once Balvenie came to stop James I from hacking apart his fallen opponent's corpse. With this gesture, James I seems to have at last defeated Henry's memory.

But the next scene reveals that this is no triumph, but rather a surrender. Perfectly in keeping with Henry's two rules of kingship quoted above, James tells Murdac that 'I have to execute [your sons]. […] I have to execute you, too. And the leader of every family that rose

with your son. You wouldn't give me peace so I'll need to buy it. […] We'll need the money for my ransom. […] I can't afford a war with England. Not until I'm safe on my throne.' Murdac Stewart replies in disgust, 'You're doing this for *money*?!' and James I replies, 'I'm doing it because I have finally learned all the job of a king' (86). Just as Henry initially proposed, it is a job that requires battle, requires public executions to make an example of dissenters, and it requires that James subject himself to the superior power of England. It requires, as quoted above, that he 'execute [his] relatives'. As James I surrenders to Henry's final demand that he pay his own ransom, he also surrenders to the demand that he shape himself as a king in Henry's image. There is only one way, he realises at the last, to do the job of a king—and it is as England, as Henry, as Shakespeare, proposed.

Henry's other rule for kingship is to to 'fuck women you don't know' (PS 18). James seems to defy this stricture through his marriage to Henry's cousin Joan Beaufort, who, it transpires, James recognises from his days as a prisoner and to whom he once wrote a secret poem of praise (72). But this, too, is undermined by James's dawning realisation that, as Munro writes in the notes to the creative team, 'Joan will never love him'.[33] Just as James I is being irrevocably dragged into the Henrican model of kingship, the play itself diverges sharply from Shakespeare, specifically on the subject of women. In James's first speech to his nobility, Munro draws upon an image that recurs several times Shakespeare: a description of rough weather upon arriving in England from across the Channel. In James I, this symbolic journey is inverted, describing his departure from Scotland on what will unintentionally become his voyage into captivity in England:

> The last sight I had of Scotland was no sight at all, it was a wet wind, driving waves and rain in my face so I couldny see. […] I felt that the sky and the sea and the wind of Scotland were scolding me, shouting their anger at me. How could I leave my own country? How could I run away? […] Eighteen years later I came up to the border and I saw the green hills, I saw the dark rocks and towering skies and the far-off mountains of home and drew breath to shout a

[33] RNT/SM/1/744, *James I* Creative Notes, 16 March 2014, p. 1.

> greeting into that dear country and—Bam! There it was again! A stour o' a wet wind, knocking me back south and roaring its disdain in my face. And I tell you this, I *love* that gale. I've missed it! (44-5).

Even down to the 'dark rocks' in contrast to England's 'chalky cliffs of Dover' (*2H6* 3.2.101), Munro conjures a mirror image of Shakespeare's emblematic rough passage, with the wet weather here a rebuke for departure and absence rather than a welcome to a strange country, as in Queen Margaret's matching speech in *2 Henry VI.* Margaret describes her arrival to England, when she too was 'nigh wrecked upon the sea, / And twice by awkward winds from England's bank / Drove back again unto my native clime' (*2H6* 3.2.82-4). This inversion of the Shakespearean trope, with Scotland as both lost homeland and hoped-for destination and England only the unnamed intermediate stop, allies James less with Shakespeare's native kings of England than with their foreign queens.

The relationship between such foreign queens and their adopted country takes up more and more of Munro's focus as the trilogy of plays continues, and it becomes a key site of divergence from the Shakespearean historical dramaturgy. Far from the inherent marginalisation of female characters and their histories, Munro departs from Shakespeare's model first by insisting on the importance of women's historical work as a key thread of history itself, not a marginal subplot, and by considering how the political marriages of medieval foreign queens necessarily complicate a vision of national identity rooted in monarchy. Thus, while borrowing the Shakespearean model of monarchical history from above, Munro revises this dramaturgy in a specifically feminist, Scottish fashion.

Though not explicitly described in the text, Sansom's original production, created in close collaboration with Munro, used *The Key Will Keep The Lock*'s single battle scene to establish an important departure from the Shakespearean historical dramaturgy that insists on female marginalisation. In Sansom's staging, James I's battle against Big James swirled around an immoveable central set piece: a bed, where James I's English wife Joan was giving

birth. The cries of her labour intermingled with the cries of fallen soldiers, and Henry and James I chased one another over, around, through the bed's four posters. Rather than setting her labour offstage, consigning it to the world of the described but undepicted, Sansom and Munro insisted powerfully on the equal historical importance of the two events: of James I's battlefield victory and of Joan's giving birth. In the final scene, the baby is revealed not as James I's heir, but as a daughter. And yet, Sansom's staging implies, this does not undercut the moment's importance. The narrative of history is not only that of male heir to male heir.

Joan enters the play with a scene that echoes another Shakespearean pair: like Katherine and Alice in Shakespeare's *Henry V,* she is taught about Scots language and Scottish culture in advance of her marriage by Meg, a Scottish lady-in-waiting. Munro emphasises the linguistic difference at play for Joan at the beginning of the text, where she shares 'some guidelines and warnings' for production: 'The rhythm and language of the dialogue is contemporary Scots. Apart from Joan and Henry V in *The Key Will Keep the Lock* and Margaret in *The True Mirror*, all characters are speaking Scots' (viii). I will return to Margaret below, but in the case of Joan, the seriousness with which Munro approaches the proposition of a foreign queen faced with a foreign language and foreign customs reads as a rebuke to Shakespeare, or perhaps simply a realistic sequel: what might have happened to Catherine of Valois after she moved to England to marry a man she barely knew? While an early modern history play frequently ends with marriage, Munro takes it as a starting point. Repeatedly, she frames her queens not as symbolic, foreign prizes, but as political actors whose difference must be continually negotiated both practically and—like Breach's determination to read between the documented lines—emotionally.

The Key Will Keep the Lock concludes with the execution of James I's Stewart cousins as their mother, Isabella, looks on. Imprisoned for life, Isabella becomes a figure reminiscent of Shakespeare's Queen Margaret when she appears in the next play in the series,

James II: Day of the Innocents. A living remnant of the previous play, she echoes Margaret's role in *Richard III* by bearing the memory of her lost sons into a new setting, and by 'cursing' the heir of the man she blames for their loss through her mourning and knowledge of the Stewart family's bloody history. This heir is James II, a teenage king traumatised by his father's murder when he was a child and haunted by nightmares of crimes committed by his ruling council in his name. One figure of his nightmares is Isabella, whom he meets when he is young, and who combines curse and prophecy in predicting that he will take after his mother and father: 'Aye, that's the blood that's in you, like black snakes creeping their way down your veins, your father's cursed blood, your mother's cruel blood. You'll be a monster, just like them […] The Dark Ones will come to you in the night and put their bloody knives in your hands and you'll use them. You'll do their work. You're cursed' (107). Isabella characterises this curse as borne in his blood, inherent to his personality and represented, in true early modern fashion, by the red birthmark on his face. But it is her actual articulation of this supposed familial curse—his inheritance of the consequences of his parents' cruelty specifically towards her and her family—that in fact sets James II on the path to its fulfilment. Her speaking the curse makes it so.

Midway through the play's second act, James II returns to visit Isabella, the first encounter we see between them that is not a memory or nightmare. Also for the first time, James II briefly attempts to counter Isabella's version of history with his own:

> JAMES: My father died a hero.
> ISABELLA: Your father died in a drain.
> JAMES: You wanted to kill my father and all his blood.
> ISABELLA: If my wishing could do it you'd be dead.
> JAMES: Who else wants us dead? […] I've had Livingston executed. […] What happens now? Will someone try to take his place? Who should I fear most?
> ISABELLA: How should I know? Why do you always come back to bother me?
> JAMES: Because you're the oldest living thing I know that talks. Tell me what you know (168).

Though James II attempts to reject Isabella's narrative of his father's history, he adopts her language of suspicion and threat, accepting that her unique knowledge of the past allows her unique insight into the future. The suspicion she has kindled lands on his best friend William, the Earl of Douglas, and in a blur of nightmare and argument, James II kills William. James is only able to contextualise the deed through Isabella's narrative of his inheritance— 'I've her dark blood. It got out. It got out. I killed him' (191)—but Isabella insists that this is not her doing: 'I came out to watch you die, but you've beaten my cursing' (191). Though Isabella repeatedly claims her curses are powerless, her recurring presence in the nightmares that eventually drive James II to waking violence proves that this is not entirely the case. Though she may not succeed in bringing about his death, she has cursed James by teaching him his history.

James II's sister Annabella witnesses this event and becomes the only character from *Day of the Innocents* to reappear in *James III: The True Mirror,* where she is identified by her role as King James III's aunt and confidante to his Danish wife, Margaret. This structural echo of Isabella was reinforced by the fact that she and the older Annabella were played by the same actor in the original productions. Annabella, too, grapples with her parents' legacy, but in quieter and less destructive terms than her brother. She, Margaret, and a lady-in-waiting called Phemy use the titular glass mirror, newly shipped from Italy and more accurate than their usual copper ones, to attempt to warn one of the king's lovers away from him— an effort that fails—and to see themselves clearly for the first time.

> ANNABELLA: It might have been kinder to kill her.
> MARGARET: How could I have done that?
> ANNABELLA: My mother would have done that. Maybe I could do that for you? It looks like I have it in me.
> *PHEMY comes to look.*
> PHEMY: It's in your eyes. I never saw that. There's terrible things in your eyes.
> ANNABELLA: I've seen terrible things. But I've done so little. […] Two husbands put me aside and all my children flowed away from me like water to the sea and here I am back in the room I was born in. And it all comes round again… (299).

The precise nature of what Annabella sees coming round again is left obscure, but perhaps she sees herself stepping into the role that Isabella once filled for her brother James II.

Once again dramaturgically mirroring Isabella (and, by extension, Shakespeare's Margaret), Annabella is one of the only members of her family to survive the play, presiding in its final moments over her great-nephew James IV's preparations for his coronation. James IV is wracked with guilt over his accession to the throne, which came about because he led a rebellion against his decadent father. In this scene, like Isabella to James II, it is Annabella who gathers the pieces of the past to create a history to guide the teenage king. Though history seems to have come round again in the dynamic between young king and old woman, the woman who has witnessed trauma and the boy who has been scarred by it, Annabella does not wield history as a curse. Instead she suggests that James IV can mine the history of his forebears only for the good. She describes her father James I just as 'a poet', his wife Joan as 'like your mother. Came hundreds of miles to be here and never left'. James II is remembered for 'lov[ing] the hunt and the football', while his wife Mary 'loved to laugh'. Thus armed with a more positive legacy, '[n]ow you can wear your father's crown. Now you're Scotland' (291-2). From the violent model of kingship proposed by the Shakespearean influences of Henry V and Isabella and transmitted to James I and II, Annabella articulates a new Scottish history and monarchy, borne by a woman's voice and memory of her family's past.

Explicit in the makeup of Scotland as defined by Annabella is a foreign presence: Queen Joan coming 'hundreds of miles', 'a wee bit of France' from James IV's grandmother Mary, and 'a wee minding' of his Danish mother (291-2). Margaret, the character identified above as one of only three in the series who do not speak Scots, radically redefines the 'Scotland' proposed by King James I when she becomes regent over the country after her husband's abdication. Her play's subtitle, *The True Mirror,* seems to allude to Shakespeare's

description, via the Chorus, of Henry V as 'the mirror of all Christian kings' (*H5* 2.0.6). For Munro, this title is partly a literal mirror, as described above, but the character who occupies Henry's role as the true mirror of good rulership is unquestionably Queen Margaret, not King James III. When James III abandons Parliament and his role as king, Queen Margaret steps forward and delivers a speech that parallels James I's in *The Key Will Keep the Lock,* asserting her right to take her husband's place while simultaneously asking, like James I, for a show of Parliamentary support. But while James I is concerned with dispelling any suspicion that he is English, Margaret opens by emphasising her foreign roots: 'Who would want the job of ruling Scotland? I'm Danish, you ignorant, abusive lump of manure! I come from a rational nation with reasonable people' (285). But this quickly becomes a form of self-deprecation, as she draws upon the same rhetorical claims to power that James I deployed in the first play: 'Would someone please tell me why a rational woman, born in a reasonable country, would rather live here and be your Queen than exist in peace and quiet, happy, peace anywhere else on earth? […] You taught me who I am. I am the Queen of Scots' (286). While James I used his identification with Scotland to draw a direct line between his body and the land itself, Margaret's insistence on her foreign origins, her unScottish difference, strengthens rather than undermines her claim to Scottish rule. James I's reorientation of regal power as a compact between king-as-land and nobility is taken even farther as Margaret reframes her claim as a question, asking for explicit consent rather than a symbolic gesture of loyalty: 'Am I not the Queen of Scots?' (287). In posing this question, she returns to the ideal that James I failed to fulfil, of a model of monarchy in defiance of the English, Shakespearean, Henrican style: foreign, cooperative, and pointedly feminine.

Though she has no literal ghost of Henry V to contend with (and she does have a metatheatrical ghost, as the actor who played Henry V also doubled as James III in all iterations of the original production) Margaret's vision of rule by consent sets her in direct

contrast with one of the most striking features of Shakespeare's characterisation of kingship. With the pointed exception of Richard III, titular kings across Shakespeare's eight tetralogy plays all arrive at a moment where they wish they were not king. King Henry IV regrets the 'bypaths and indirect crook'd ways / I met this crown' (*2H4* 4.3.314-5), while King Henry V and King Henry VI struggle under the weight of what they have inherited, Henry V lamenting empty 'ceremony' (*H5* 4.1.228), and Henry VI insisting that 'never subject longed to be a king / As I do long and wish to be a subject!' (*2H6* 4.9.5-6). Richard II wishes he could be 'a mockery king of snow' (*R2* 4.1.260). Munro's own James III partially fits this pattern, happy to have wealth and luxury, but resentful of the cost: 'I've had so many [choices], haven't I? I don't remember choosing to marry you, Margaret, do you remember choosing to marry me? I'll just go and live in Tuscany, shall I? Make a wee pilgrimage to Rome and never come back? It's not like I'm imprisoned on the throne of Scotland or anything, is it?!' (256). But in her Queen Margaret, Munro breaks from Shakespeare's model of unwilling kings to propose a queenship defined by will and consent: Margaret is willing to take the crown to keep the country from chaos, and she asks her lords' permission to have it. This willingness is rooted not in a birthright connection to the earth itself, but to what Margaret describes as earned love: 'I am the Queen of Scots. And no, I don't always like that. But I do love it. Always' (286). Her love of her adopted country invests her more deeply in its welfare than her husband's blood connection. Though this framing makes the spouses' parallel relationships to the country they rule seem ironic, there is no irony in Munro's depiction of Margaret's claim. If James I's effort to create a purely Scottish style of kingship ended in his surrender to Henry's English vision, Margaret embodies the fulfilment of his goal in a Scottish rulership that need not be Scottish by birth. As described above, the play's final, hopeful image of Scottish kingship laid out by Annabella deliberately incorporates the

non-Scottish, the inescapable contributions of foreign Queens to a vision of national identity defined from above by monarchy.

The gentlewoman Meg is the first to tell Joan that she is to be married to James I. Joan is incredulous, and Meg insists it's true: she's going to be a queen. More than that, '[y]ou're going to be Scottish. You're going to be more Scottish than me' (22). This is the opposite of Henry V's parting sentiments to King James I just one scene before: 'you're ours, you are England' (17). For Meg, wearing the crown of Scotland makes Joan the embodiment of Scotland and Scottishness, no matter her actual origins or how little she feels at home in her new country. For Henry, James's birth in Scotland and return to Scotland can never undermine his English upbringing and literal and metaphorical debts to the English crown. Munro's three plays mine this contradiction in dramaturgical and thematic terms, framing the tension between English and Scottish—between Shakespeare by way of Henry V and something new—as a quest not only for a particularly Scottish history and national identity, but for a new way of understanding the history play's traditional relationship between king and country. '[Y]ou've never beaten me,' Henry taunts James I, 'And you never will' (12). James I himself never does. But Munro's plays excavate Shakespearean forms, probing their weaknesses and expanding their scope to revise their vision of kingship—and the role of women in that vision—for the present.

Of the three plays discussed here, Munro engages in the most direct detail with Shakespeare's works themselves, whereas Lloyd Malcolm and Breach concern themselves more with an idea of Shakespeare and his way of writing disconnected from how any of the plays operate structurally. By echoing his female archetypes—Queen Joan in parallel with Princess Catherine, Isabella and Annabella with *Richard III'*s Queen Margaret—Munro suggests that she recognises both the essential presence and the shortcomings of these roles, particularly from the perspective of contemporary performance, where actors are naturally

less concerned with their role's dramaturgical importance than with how much they will have to do. Perhaps the most striking example of Munro's renegotiations is the echoing of the two Margarets in *The True Mirror.* It is of course historical fact that creates the matching names of Munro's Queen Margaret of Denmark and Shakespeare's Queen Margaret of Anjou, but the comparison is a fruitful example of Munro's expansion of the Shakespearean precedent.

Though Margaret's importance as a central character in the *Henry VI* plays satisfies the contemporary desire for large, active female roles, her push for personal power is never legitimated by the structure of the play itself. As discussed in Chapter 1, in *3 Henry VI* she is not conclusively vilified for her active pursuit of the throne because she undertakes it on her son's behalf. It is in *2 Henry VI,* when her longing for power is more personal, that she attracts more negative associations of personal envy, adultery, and excessive emotion (though not unambiguously so; see Chapter 3). Margaret of Denmark's peaceful and positive assumption of the regency fills the space for women that Shakespeare acknowledges could exist, but cannot quite allow.

In contrast, *Emilia* and *It's True, It's True, It's True* reflect popular assumptions about Shakespeare's histories and the women within them. While *Emilia* borrows an apparently traditional Shakespearean structure and flexible relationship with historical accuracy, the motivation for this flexibility—a rejection of the supposedly fundamentally sexist apparatus of documented history itself—inadvertently also replicates the Shakespearean marginalisation of female contributions to history, admitting only women that can be confined within relatively narrow terms. *It's True, It's True, It's True,* on the other hand, bears essentially no formal resemblance to Shakespeare at all. While its opening stage direction suggests that it sees its insistent interruption of the formally historical with the personal and impressionistic as '*not* Shakespeare'—a deliberate defiance of his historical

dramaturgy—in fact the play echoes Munro in providing a more detailed and extreme expression of something that Shakespeare's plays already contain.

Breach cannot be blamed for overlooking Shakespeare's consistent and deliberate embedding of mourning and other expressions of passion into his histories, as the bulk of the critical analysis and adaptation of these plays over time has done the same. There is no question that Shakespeare is ripe for critique and revision in terms of his sexual politics and the literal stage time and space granted to women in his vision of history. It is perfectly valid, too, for Breach and Lloyd Malcolm to engage with the stereotype of Shakespeare that dominates popular understanding of his works. Their engagement with this oversimplified Shakespeare resulted in exciting and critically lauded attempts to expand and reimagine the space that women can hold in history, rather than blandly reproducing exclusionary narratives in the manner of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's *All The Way,* discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which likewise draws on stereotype rather than the realities of the texts to claim its 'Shakespearean' identity. But this stereotype of Shakespeare is indeed overly simplistic and risks, as Meyer writes, reinforcing the inaccurate idea that women do not exist in Shakespeare or in narratives of the past. Such an assumption allows contemporary artists and readers to avoid reckoning with the fact that the image of a Shakespearean history entirely free from women comes from our imagination, not Shakespeare's.

CONCLUSION | 'This is what you came to see'

In the winter of 2019, Shakespeare's Globe performed an adapted version of *2* and *3 Henry VI* in repertory with *Richard III.*[1] Double cast as Suffolk at the beginning of *Henry VI* and Lady Elizabeth Grey at the end of *Henry VI* and in *Richard III*, actor Nina Bowers found the contrast between her two roles difficult to manage. She found herself inhabiting the same place in the rehearsal room as her characters did in the plays: as Suffolk, confident and happy to share her thoughts with the room; as Elizabeth, constantly second-guessing herself, afraid that her ideas were intrusive, distracting, and unwelcome. Actor Mattie Houghton likewise struggled to navigate the distance between her early role as the Duke of Somerset and subsequent portrayal of Lady Anne in *Richard III.* Neither Houghton nor Bowers felt at ease in *Richard III.* Like their characters, both actors felt they were in a constant battle to be heard, fighting to have their characters' stories and emotional journeys taken seriously. Both admitted to sometimes feeling anger and resentment towards audiences who laughed at Richard during their respective scenes with him, even while acknowledging that the lines are funny and invite such a response. But they felt themselves confined to a different dramatic world, one that did not permit them to take control of either the performance or the rehearsal process—a position they were able to recognise as stemming specifically from their roles within the play due to their completely different emotional experiences playing powerful men in *Henry VI*.

A similar frustration was shared by Jonathan Broadbent, who played King Henry VI, and expressed disappointment with himself that he was unable to feel he had ever really controlled the course of the play or even of his own performance. In contrast to the easy,

[1] I was a rehearsal room researcher and dramaturg on these productions, and was present throughout the production process, including helping to conflate and adapt their version of *Henry VI*. Reflections are taken from my own journals and personal conversations with and observations of the company over the course of the rehearsal and performance processes.

comfortable, and controlled experience of playing Buckingham in *Richard III,* as Henry he felt at the mercy of other actors' decisions, especially those of the actor playing Margaret, not able to shape his own onstage story.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the integral role female characters play in Shakespeare's understanding of historical drama. Textually, those who inhabit a feminine historical position—which can include men, like Henry VI—are simultaneously excluded from the historical frame and empowered by this exclusion. Existing at the margins of the drama, they challenge the very narrative structures that exclude them, pointing to untold stories, unresolved efforts, and the artificiality of their plays' dramaturgy. From outside the linear narrative of history, they can look to both past and future with unique clarity. Rather than being seen as excluded from or exceptions to the expected patterns of a history play, female characters' vital presence must be permitted to reshape our understanding of a history play's form and purpose, transforming it from cohesive ideological tool to a contested, multivocal form that does not seek to disguise its limitations. Bowers, Houghton, and Broadbent's difficulties locating this form of empowerment in rehearsal stemmed in part from the difficulty of shedding common assumptions about what a history play is for, and how characters within a historical narrative must act if they are to be seen as important. This had implications in performance and in rehearsal alike, as Bowers and Houghton in particular felt that the apparently inessential roles their female characters played meant they did not have the right to speak up about their discomfort, that time spent on their difficulties was time wasted, taken from more important scenes—an impression reinforced by the strict time constraints posed by traditional British rehearsal processes, which meant that the limited time available was necessarily dedicated to focusing on the much larger role of Richard. Thus, the shape of the rehearsal process took on the shape of traditional historical narratives: a

powerful man at the centre, everyone else—women in particular—inevitably pushed to the sides.

The nature of Broadbent's conflict was somewhat different. Playing a man and the titular character, he battled assumptions not only about how a male character ought to express power, but how a history play should be built structurally around a single, central protagonist. When *Henry VI* failed to support a now-traditional tragic protagonist's journey for Henry, Broadbent feared it was his failure as an actor to understand Henry's character, not the lack of such an arc in the text. Even adapted, as this production was, a centralised storyline for Henry did not and could not be made to exist. Broadbent's frustrations arguably mirrored Henry's own state of mind at his failures to emulate his more-powerful father—a father whose plays much more deliberately and recognisably centre him as their protagonist.

All three actors' experiences in rehearsal paralleled their characters' struggles with power and marginalisation in the plays themselves, an unexpected synchronicity that points to the importance of revising our understanding of the importance of feminine characters in Shakespeare's history plays. More than just an abstract scholarly fact, it has a bearing on who feels welcome, comfortable, and important to the process of reproducing Shakespeare's vision of history. Moreover, it is a vision we continue to reproduce in other forms, as our historical films, plays, and novels are still shaped in Shakespeare's image: a man, usually a leader or ruler, whose personal rise (and often fall) structures the drama. The diversity of tones and forms of historical storytelling from the early modern period, from ballads to historical comedies, have been effaced by the dominance of Shakespeare's predominantly masculine, tragically-inflected vision of history. Complicating that vision is therefore a means of undermining this patriarchal dramaturgy at its root and, as the experiences of these actors demonstrates, can possibly transform artists' interactions with Shakespeare in practical ways. Participation in history does not have to be limited to the deeds of lords and politicians,

and those deeds do not need to be the types of things—debates, battles, murders—that make up the accepted key points on the typical historical timeline. If we reject the inaccurate assumption that from its beginnings, the history play genre has had no place for women, and instead learn to read the things female characters do as a valid form of history, we will beget new histories, and new ways of telling them.

Bowers, Broadbent, and Houghton's experiences complicate any desire to conclude that the feminine space of the history plays is unequivocally powerful or even comfortable to inhabit as a modern performer. These characters are manipulated and exposed. Their powerful tools of history-telling, prophecy, and cursing are all ultimately rooted in their grief, and that loss must be laid bare for public display. We cannot know how early modern actors experienced the performance of emotional vulnerability, but for most contemporary performers, trained in and accustomed to a naturalistic style of acting, it is an experience that demands some degree of personal emotional exposure. The displays of virtuosic lament that may have been designed as showcases for talented boy actors have become the entry fee for female actors to participate in many of Shakespeare's plays, including the histories. They must demonstrate their talent for raw emotion, for undergoing loss and abuse (and looking pretty while doing it), in order to have a place within these stories. The dramaturgical structures that render these characters essential to Shakespeare's vision of history exist above and outside the individual experience of inhabiting a role.

A deeper understanding of the essential nature of these roles perhaps would have allowed Bowers and Houghton to feel more secure in the complicated position their characters inhabit. Broadbent, too, may have found a better way to understand why the titular character he portrayed failed to act as a protagonist apparently should. But my aim has not necessarily been to defend Shakespeare, or to claim that his depictions of female characters are in fact positive or feminist—only that they are purposeful, and in neglecting them, we

neglect a key to understanding his relationship to dramatising history. While the secondary roles female characters play in Shakespeare's history look perhaps like the kind of perfunctory gesture towards a wider world that we see in many historical films and plays written today, their structural role is anything but thoughtless. The consistency of the dramaturgy of Shakespeare's female characters across the history plays is remarkable: they narrate alternative genealogies, view both past and future with unique clarity, strain at the boundaries of their genre in distinctive but shared ways, and embed throughout the histories a correlation between gender and power. Female characters are an inescapable, set feature of how Shakespeare constructs a history play, one of the stock elements he draws upon as reliably as battle scenes, doomed heirs, cheeky clowns, and reluctant kings who undergo a dark night of the soul. But as Chapter 5 and these anecdotes have illustrated, there are limits to what his vision can offer to artists of today. By digging into the nature of Shakespeare's dramatic structures, it is my hope that we can begin to see and understand our Shakespearean dramaturgical inheritance more clearly, and begin to see its features not as inevitabilities, but as artistic choices that need not always be replicated.

Bowers, Broadbent, and Houghton each separately found the same means of resisting the uncomfortable confinement of their marginalised roles. Like the female characters this thesis has described, they turned to the fact of their embodied presence onstage, the power of silence, their ability to briefly and quietly break the drama's frame, in order to gain some control over their place in the story. In moments—Broadbent before each of the adapted *Henry VI*'s three intervals, Bowers and Houghton during their scenes with Richard in *Richard III*—all three would look to the audience. All three understood the gesture differently: as a cry for help, or a means of holding the audience to account, or a demand that someone meet their eyes, or a moment to seek out an audience member who seemed sympathetic to what their characters were suffering rather than delighted by Richard's

manipulations. Describing her thought process as Elizabeth as she gazed out at the audience after bidding farewell to the imprisoned Princes in the Tower, Bowers said, ‘I’m just looking out there thinking, ‘This is what you came to see. You came to see my babies get killed.’’ But in this shared, extratextual means of asserting control over roles that left them feeling powerless and marginalised, all three actors tapped into the textual power that these female and effeminate roles hold. With a look outwards, they invited the audience to consider the possibility of other stories, the histories left untold, the words they did not have the space to say.

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